Film Quarterly

Volume 48
Number 2
Winter 1994–95

Vittorio Storaro Interview • Recharging *Alexander Nevsky*

Documentary and the Power of Interrogation

The Politics of *Imagining Indians*

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A Certain Realism

Making Use of Pasolini's Film Theory and Practice

MAURIZIO VIANO

Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) was arguably the most complex director of postwar Italian cinema. His films—*Accattone*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Medea*, *Saló*—continue to challenge and entertain new generations of moviegoers. A leftist, a homosexual, and a distinguished writer of fiction, poetry, and criticism, Pasolini once claimed that "a certain realism" informed his filmmaking.

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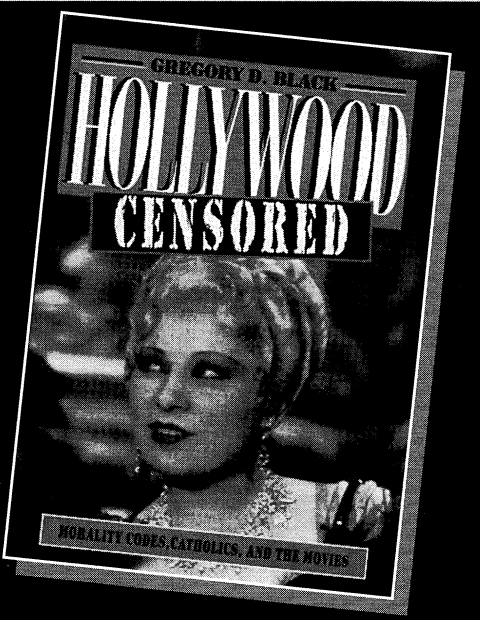

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Vol. 48, No. 2 [pp. 2-9]
Writing with Light: An Interview with Vittorio Storaro

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Vittorio Storaro on location for *Little Buddha*

Writing with

An Interview with

The late British cinematographer and Academy Award winner John Alcott once remarked that *Reds* (1981), photographed by Vittorio Storaro, was "the most beautifully textured film ever made." Haskell Wexler, a multi-Academy winner for cinematography, called *Agatha* (1978) "a beautifully lit film. The pinnacle of what we can do in our profession with light." *American Cinematographer* recently commented that Storaro is "a living cornerstone in the art of cinematography." And the International Film Festival for the Art of Cinematography in Torun, Poland, presented the lifetime achievement award to the 54-year-old Storaro in November of last year.

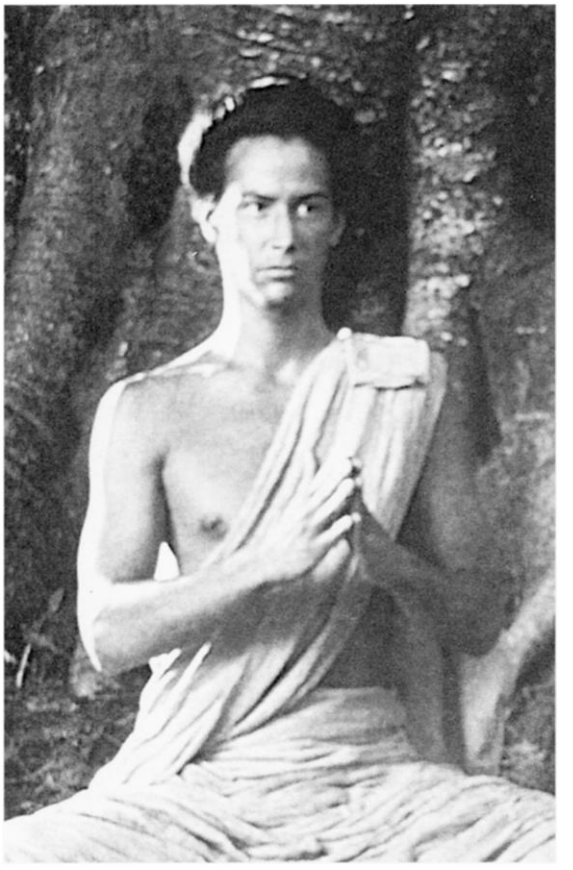
Storaro prefers the term "photography" for what he does, which, he is quick to point out, means "to write with light." Lush, lyric, sensuous, exquisitely illumined, each of Storaro's films is the outcome of aesthetic premeditation combined with a mastery of film technology.

Influenced to work behind the camera by his father, a projectionist at Lux Films in Rome, Storaro later became the youngest first assistant and camera operator in the Italian film industry, and then a black-and-white cinematographer before his career took a dramatic turn when he met another young prodigy, Bernardo Bertolucci. Their subsequent films together remain among the most important and influential of our time: *The Spider's Strategem* (1969), *The Conformist* (1970), *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), *1900* (1975), *Luna* (1979), *The Last Emperor* (1987), *The Sheltering Sky* (1990). Bertolucci has said, "Not even

Ric Gentry

Light

Vittorio Storaro



Keanu Reeves as Siddhartha in *Little Buddha*

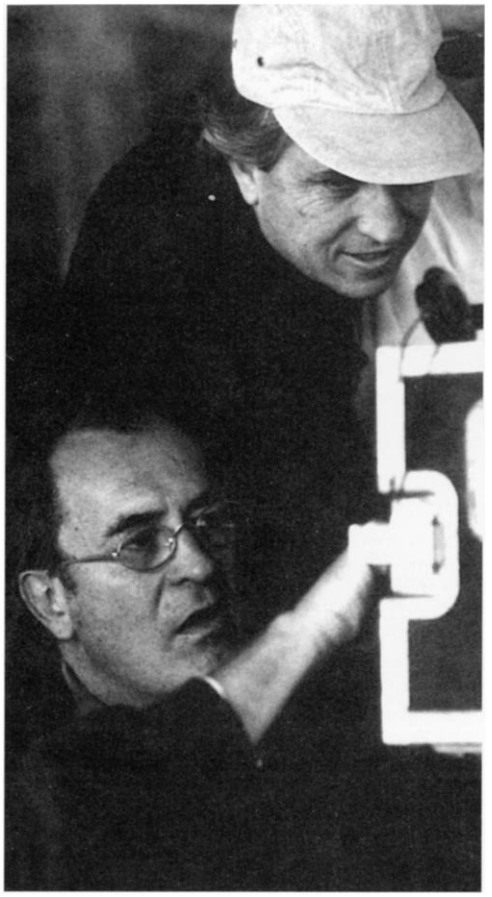
my marriage was as close as my relationship with Vittorio."

Storaro was again collaborating with Bertolucci on *Little Buddha*, the story of a deputation of Tibetan Buddhist monks who "discover" the reincarnation of one of their most exalted lamas as an eight-year-old Seattle boy and eventually return with him to Bhutan, where two other children, a boy from Kathmandu and a girl from Nepal, are also discovered to be reincarnations of the lama. Parallel to this is the story of Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the original Buddha, who 2500 years ago abandoned his royal berth for a wandering ascetic life in search of spiritual fulfillment that culminated with his experience of enlightenment.

For Storaro, for whom the progress of his art is synonymous with self-realization, *Little Buddha* "is not just a movie." As he discusses here, his work on the film was the culmination of everything he had sought to achieve both photographically and personally since the beginning of his career. It even occurred to him that *Little Buddha* was perhaps "something you could not go beyond."

The winner of three Academy Awards, for *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Reds*, and *The Last Emperor*, and further distinguished by his work on *One from the Heart* (1982), *Ladyhawke* (1985), *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* (1988), and *Dick Tracy* (1990, Academy Award nomination), among others, Storaro was interviewed just as he had completed *Roma: Imago Urbis*, a 15-part chronicle that meticulously invokes the timeless grandeur of ancient Rome. It was the natural place to begin our discussion, but *Roma: Imago Urbis* quickly proved germane to the subject of *Little Buddha*.

Our conversation was in English.



Storaro (top) watching playback with Bernardo Bertolucci

Ric Gentry: You're working on Roma: Imago Urbis *now?*

Vittorio Storaro: I just finished last night. Yesterday was the last day of shooting, which started six years ago. It is the longest project I've ever worked on. It's a portrait of ancient Rome—a mosaic of the city. They're calling it the first attempt to create "a multimedia encyclopedia" in the modern sense. It's made for television, it will also be in theaters, but one of the primary forms of distribution will be a combination of book—with my own production photographs—and video. In about two years there will be a second release with laserdisc, and we're also considering interactive computer programs, CD-ROM, something like that.

What attracted you to the project?

Several things. . . . One was the opportunity to work with the director, my good friend Luigi Bazzoni. Another was the challenge of the project itself, which was basically to discover ancient Rome through its monuments and artifacts, without any distractions or signs of modern life—in a sense, to create something that was timeless.

But there was also something else. I told you a long time ago that the first part of my professional life, and the way that I was trying to come to a better understanding of myself, was based on my research and study of light and each of its of properties, such as shadow and penumbra, artificial and natural, and so on. Later on, I became more interested in qualities of light itself, the spectrum of light, in colors, "the children of light," as Leonardo put it. I spent a long time researching the meaning of color, what kind of response the human body has to it, how we can visualize sentiment and emotion with color, how this all relates to the physiology and psychology of the human being.

Then, after *The Last Emperor*, I knew that I had to take another step in trying to find balance between all these different things. In the beginning, I was mainly trying to divide, to separate light from shadow, then red from blue, one color from another. It was not always conscious, but it was what I was trying to do. Now it was time to see if I could put them together, to find more harmony.

The idea came to me to go back to ancient Greek philosophy, the pre-Socratics, who determined that life consists of four basic elements: water, earth, fire, and air. I wanted to understand how I could begin to visualize life itself through these four elements. And I began to think that maybe with these 15 hours of documentary I might be able to do a kind of resume of my professional life. I thought I should divide the series into three parts. One would mainly be the journey with light. One would be the journey *within* light, into color. And the third would be to try to find balance between these, but mainly the idea of balance between the four elements.

Do you feel that you succeeded?

You will see the difference. It was an important journey into myself. But I'm telling you all of this because it's connected to *Little Buddha*. Because all along, with my sensibility, my cultural background, my own experience, I'm trying to express what I really am. I am trying to describe the story of the film through the visualization, the photography, so that the viewer can feel and understand, consciously and unconsciously, what the story is about.

Of course, I'm always working very hard to complement the director's vision, but it is also my own story, because I'm using everything within myself to do that. From my first movie [*Giovinezza, Giovinezza*, 1969] up to *Apocalypse Now*, that was the first part, when I was mainly concerned about light. From then until *The Last Emperor* was the second part, where I was moving into light itself and the investigation into color. And after *The Last Emperor*

is the third part, where I am trying to find visualization through the balance of elements.

When did you first speak to Bertolucci about making Little Buddha?

Quite honestly, I believe *Little Buddha* goes beyond the normal professional considerations of that kind. I think I have been preparing *Little Buddha* for 54 years, since I was born, in the sense that everything in my life was unconsciously moving me toward it. For me, it is a kind of journey within yourself, trying to come to terms with the meaning of your life, trying to come to terms with all the fundamental questions that confront a human being.

In another way, but subconsciously, I was preparing for the experience of *Little Buddha* with several books that I read. One was given to me by Luigi Bazzoni, called *Adventure of Consciousness*, by Sri Aurobindo, who was a great Indian yogi and political activist living at the turn of the century. One thing that really touched me about his book was the basic idea that you can discover your own subconscious, and that the deeper you go into it, the more you can understand the outer levels of your consciousness, which is the overconscious. Do you understand what I mean?

There is a line where you are right now, your consciousness. The deeper you delve into your subconscious, the more, in the same proportion, you can understand—when you return back up—your overconscious, which is above the level of consciousness.

Is this a model for meditation, this movement inward to enrich consciousness?

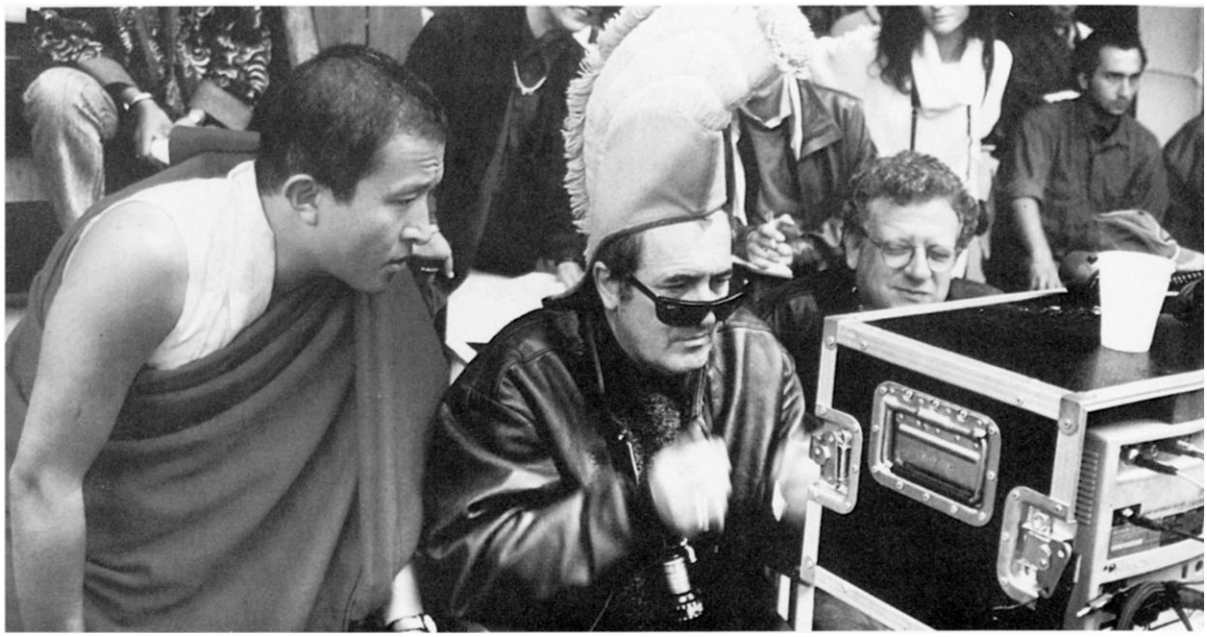
Not only that. . . . Many philosophers have studied the relationship between the subconscious and consciousness. Freud was the most important; he used this theory to help people, because human beings can live better when they're in balance between these two levels of consciousness.

Yogis use the word "meditation." Psychoanalysts use the word "analysis." So Aurobindo said, the deeper you go, the more you will understand. And one thing that really touched me while I was reading his book was the fact that human beings, any moment that they have an idea, any moment that they have an inspiration, that is the moment they can go above the level of consciousness to look into the overconscious.

And I think that is such a wonderful principle, the fact that we are moving along the level of consciousness, but in that moment—when you are writing, you find the words to express an idea that jumps forth. Or working in photography, I have an idea, how to make that light—that moment is our chance to go into the overconscious and come back afterwards into the normal level of consciousness. Don't you think that is beautiful?

So I gave this book to Bernardo. I said, "Bernardo, you should read this." I also wrote into the book, "I know you're not going to read this book right now, but I know you will some time at the appropriate moment."

Celebration after the confirmation of Jesse (Alex Wiesendanger, center), the boy from Seattle, as the reincarnation of Lama Dorje



Bertolucci on the set with Dzongsar Kheyentse Rinpoche, technical advisor to *Little Buddha*

A few years later, after *The Last Emperor*, Bernardo said to me one day, "You know, Vittorio, what I did yesterday? I was in my sitting room, wandering around, thinking, when suddenly my eye caught one book on the shelf. I went over and I picked up this book. I opened it and read what you wrote me."

It was a turning point. Bernardo had also begun his own research into Oriental philosophy when he started putting together *The Last Emperor*, but now there was this connection between Bernardo and myself through Aurobindo's book. Finally, it was I think 1989, I was doing *Dick Tracy,* when Bernardo said, "What do you think about doing a movie about Buddha?" It was an idea that practically came as we were speaking on the telephone.

So in a sense, you and Bernardo were exercising Aurobindo's principle, only in unison, together.

That's right. Everything just seemed very essentially connected. And after that, I began to consider ways to visualize it, what I would need for the photography, while Bernardo began to further consider the story itself. And you know, the moment I began to think about visualizing the film was a major step. I mean, how can you visualize "the enlightenment"? As soon as I began to think about that, I knew it would continue the journey within myself.

Then later, Bernardo said, "Vittorio, I've decided not to do a movie just about Buddha. I think I'd like to do a movie about a lama in search of the reincarnation of his own master who finds three children. And when the lama finds the children, he begins to tell the story of Buddha."

From the moment he gave me the basic structure, I saw that we had three different countries, one for each of the children. And three children and one master. And the basic idea of Siddhartha—the original name of the Buddha, which means "the awakened one"— is that he finds his balance, his equilibrium, his realization, his enlightenment. And I thought, "My God, this is exactly what I was looking for with this further step into myself, this research into how to visualize and achieve balance through the four elements."

Then I said to myself, Let's think for a moment if Lama Norbu can be represented by the element of earth. Earth is an element of nourishment, and to nourish is also to impart knowledge. The lama is the teacher of these children, like the father and the mother at the same time. So I decided to represent the lama by the element of earth with the color of black, which is the symbol of matter. Matter is the loam, the vital soil. Matter is the material.

Then I ascribed an element to each of the three children—water, fire, and air—and the corresponding color. For Jesse in Seattle, it was the element of water and the color green. For Raju, the other little boy, of Kathmandu, it was the element of fire and the color red. For Gita, the girl of Nepal, it was the element of air and the color blue. This was not arbitrary—these elements were in the nature of their characters and their geographies.

So this was my basic approach to the visualization, and throughout *Little Buddha* you will see the elements in these and other ways, sometimes more independently, sometimes simultaneously, some-

times symbolically, but always striving for harmony, leading to a fifth manifestation, which is energy, the energy of pure white light which is the enlightenment.

In terms of using the elements and the colors, did you achieve this through filtration, through lighting, in the printing process, or in working with the set or costume designer, or a combination of these?

Each of those. In other words, in order to apply what I have described to you on screen, that combination of light and color, I used everything in my knowledge of photography to achieve that goal. So naturally I used one specific film stock, one specific set of lenses, one specific kind of filtration, one way of printing to achieve the colors for Seattle and the element of water. I did something nearly the opposite in Kathmandu to achieve the element of fire: another film stock, different filtration, different light, different lenses, different printing. There was something different for the sequences of Lama Norbu in Bhutan and something different for the girl in Nepal. And when I did the sequence of Siddhartha for the enlightenment, I used *all four*. It's like you're using different punctuation and different adjectives to create a style out of language in describing one part of the story you're writing in relation to another part.

And then of course, the transition of one section to another, the fusion or the pulling away or the prominence of each element in the story as it happened, told me how to prepare, what I would need technically to bring all of this forth. To put it simply, any ideation in the film which concerns photography is very, very important to me.

Now another thing was, in visualizing the story of Siddhartha, I proposed a different method of filming altogether. Instead of CinemaScope anamorphic, I suggested we use 65mm negative, the same system used in shooting *Lawrence of Arabia* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* a long time ago, which is the most beautiful and sophisticated way of filming a story for the large screen.

Earlier I tried to persuade Bernardo and [producer] Jeremy Thomas to shoot the entire film in 65mm, but they felt that the format would be too expensive and the equipment in that format perhaps too cumbersome and restrictive, though I didn't necessarily believe it would be too restrictive. There was a time when that was true, but the technology has improved.

Have you worked in 65mm before?

Yes, in 65mm 3D with Francis Coppola for the "Captain Eo" attraction produced by George Lucas at Disneyland. That was really my first time. But I did tests with 65mm before working on *Dick Tracy*, which indicated that there would be very little difference in the working methods with 65mm as opposed to CinemaScope anamorphic, maybe the kind of dolly the camera would be attached to, that kind of thing. Not much at all.

Now while we were preparing for *Little Buddha* we studied 17th-century Indian miniature paintings that depicted the life of Buddha which had perfect details and saturated colors, and we wondered how it might be possible to achieve that kind of look. We thought it would be wonderful if the story of Buddha in the film could be represented in this way somehow, so that as Lama Norbu begins the story to the children it could begin as if you were opening this wonderful, beautiful illustrated book before the children's gaze.

Then while we were in Kathmandu shooting one of the other sequences for the contemporary story, it occurred to me that the best way to contrast the contemporary story with the ancient, fabled one was to photograph the life of Buddha sequences in 65mm negative, which has a much higher resolution, is much more precise and detailed, much richer in image quality. It would be a change in the texture of the film, but it would give it that story-book quality. It would still be color and in the same aspect ratio, but it would be much more beautiful, a subtle way of depicting this ideal world.

Bernardo liked the idea immediately, and though we were already on location in this remote area of the world we were able to mobilize everything to begin the first Buddha sequences within a week.

It was a Monday morning in November of 1992 when we began to shoot the first scene of the story of Buddha, now with the 65mm cameras. The moon was rising in the sky while Queen Maia was dreaming about a spirit appearing to her in the figure of a little white elephant which, in kissing her face, was blessing the birth of her coming child, who is Siddhartha. Hardly anyone was even aware of the change in the cameras or the format. It was a very beautiful moment in the story and it was also a demonstration of the higher quality that can be achieved in motion pictures with very little additional expense and with virtually identical ways of working with the camera.

And I think this is important, because it's a step toward what I think should become a standard for motion pictures, not just in terms of the quality of the image but also in maintaining fidelity to the composition of the movie as intended by the film-makers. This is a bit complicated, but you know, no matter how

successful a movie is, it has a much longer life on the electronic screen, and there is almost always a compromise in composition for this change in aspect ratios. I mean, cinema is a language of images, and changing the original composition to accommodate the electronic version of the film is to alter the linguistic expression, the style, and ultimately the film itself. It is like cutting a painting to fit the wall space where you want to put it.

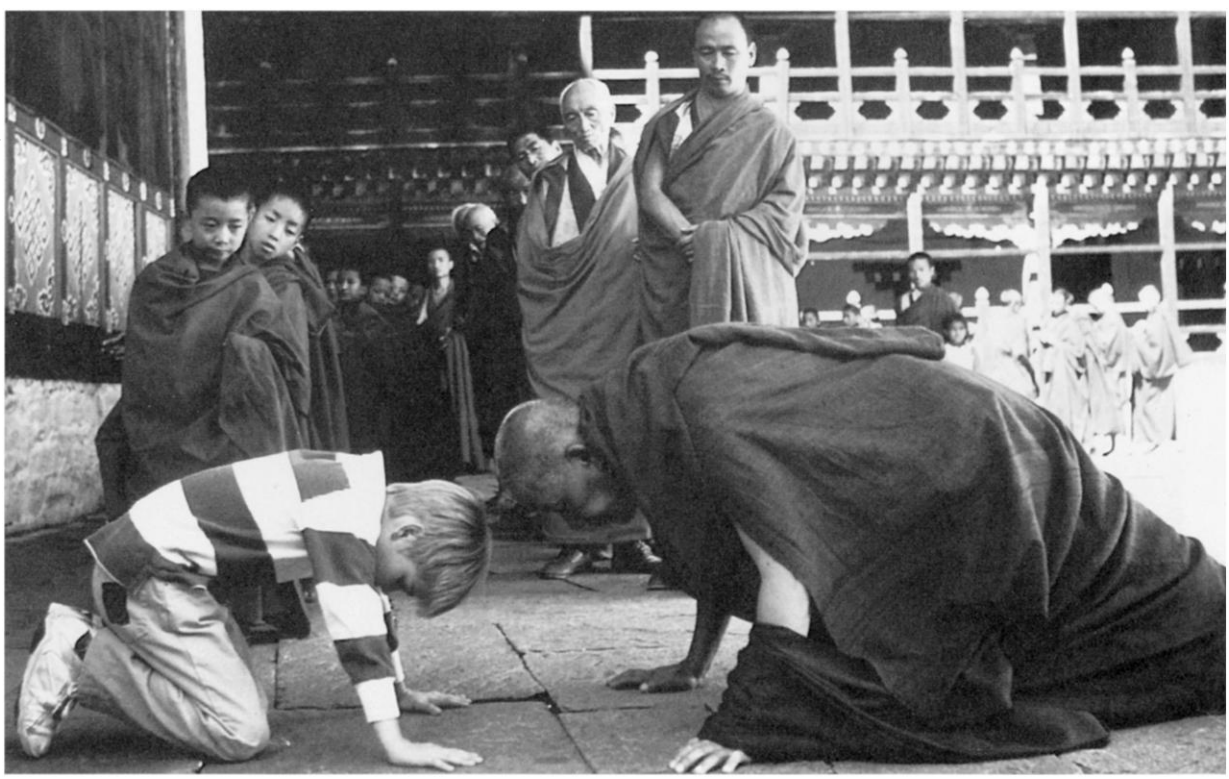
Now the future of HDVS (High Definition Video System) is inevitable. The aspect ratio between 65mm and HDVS is not very far apart, and by subtracting .2 from 65mm and adding .2 to HDVS, we can establish a balance between them, a 1:2 aspect ratio—in both formats—that will enable us to compose an image that will be identical in either medium. I think this is very important and we must work with the advances in technology to achieve it.

Another thing was that throughout Siddhartha's pilgrimage I was trying to give a feeling of a cycle, to give a sense of his birth and rebirth. In each scene there was a light from a certain time of the day to move the cycle forward—day, sunset, dusk, night, dawn, day again but at a different time than before, sunset again, and so on. And in having this different aspect of light for each scene, there was also the earth in relation to the sun, to the other planets, to the larger sphere beyond, to a motion within all space and time.

And what about the enlightenment scene itself?

This sense of cycle culminated with that scene. If you notice, when Lama Norbu is beginning to tell the story to the children—of Siddhartha seeking his own enlightenment under the tree—it is daytime. When the children enter the scene to observe Siddhartha under the tree and he is distracted by the daughters of Mara (lord of darkness), everything gradually progresses into sunset. When the wind begins to blow to signal the approach of Mara, night is arriving. As the children go around to the other side of the tree, they find that it is complete night over the ocean. Across and above the ocean is a battalion of soldiers whose arrows become blossoms that shower down on Siddhartha, and after that the moon begins to rise at the same time as the dawn is breaking. When Siddhartha confronts the embodiment of his ego, the root cause of duality, it's dawn, and at that moment the sun and the moon are in balance. Each is a symbol representing the conscious and the unconscious. Sun, day: consciousness. Moon, night: unconsciousness. So I put them in balance, gave them equilibrium. Soon Siddhartha wins the struggle with duality, so that consciousness dominates and becomes the overconscious.

So in one sequence I did the entire cycle of the four elements and the entire journey of the sun and the moon. When the children are approaching Siddhartha, you have the feeling of the earth, where he is sitting



Lama Norbu (Ying Ruocheng, right) acknowledges Jesse as the reincarnation of his mentor, Lama Dorje

firmly on the ground. When the wind arrives with the daughters of Mara and disperses their bodies into ash there is the element of air. When the children cross over to the other side of the tree there is the ocean, symbol for water. When the soldiers attack, their burning arrows are the symbol of fire. And when the struggle ends and everything is calm and the petals are falling, all the light returns to white as the symbol for energy, the overconscious.

You once mentioned before that light itself has a mystical quality.

Light is energy, and I think that we not only originate from this energy but it is also our reality. The essence of light has this spiritual quality, whether we know it or not. Even if we don't understand, even if we don't believe, even if we refuse, even if we don't know, it has to be.

As I told you, *Little Buddha* is not just a movie for me. It is really a part of my own life. Without *Little Buddha*, it was like a journey that was stopped. Then, for a moment, I was afraid that *Little Buddha* was almost the end of the journey, the end of what I had been seeking. It was something that you could not go beyond.

At the end of the movie, after Lama Norbu dies, the ashes of his cremated body are dispersed by each of the children in a different way: in the air, in water, back to the earth. It's taking the human body and dividing it again into the elements. This was something I understood because of my earlier realization about the elements: that as we are composed of matter we are also composed of energy.

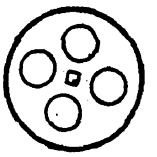
I think each movie is a part of your life, even if you don't want it to be, because while you're living you're working and through your work you're expressing yourself. And step by step as you express yourself, you grow as a human being, and likewise the more you grow as a human being the more you express yourself. That happens any day in life. That happens any time you're given work.

But with *Little Buddha* this was even more true. The night before you shoot you review the script for the next day. It's not just a scene of some people fighting or a car chase or a love sequence. You read the script to *Little Buddha* and you say, "OK, tomorrow we're shooting the birth of Siddhartha," or "tomorrow we're shooting the enlightenment," or "tomorrow the lama who is dying will witness his own death through deep meditation." So you wake up the next day and you're coming to terms with what you will do to complete the scene, and to do that you must confront the major questions that exist in your own life.

Do you know what I mean? You are constantly aware, at any single moment, in any single frame, of the meaning of your own life, the meaning of mortality, the meaning of hope, the meaning of love and compassion, the meaning of the past and the future, the meaning of your journey.

My fear about completing *Little Buddha* was that maybe there would be no other chapter in my life that would be as strong or as important. But when I finished I said to myself, No, this is not the end at all. This is the beginning of something else. I have opened another door. I will undertake another journey. I don't know where it will take me or where it will end. I don't know what I'm going to do tomorrow. But that's the beauty of discovery.

■ Ric Gentry is a film-maker and freelance writer in Los Angeles; he is on the editorial board of *Post Script.*



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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. Susan Alexander, Administrative Manager, Journals Division, UC Press.

Roger and Me: Roger Smith, Chairman of General Motors

Miles Orvell

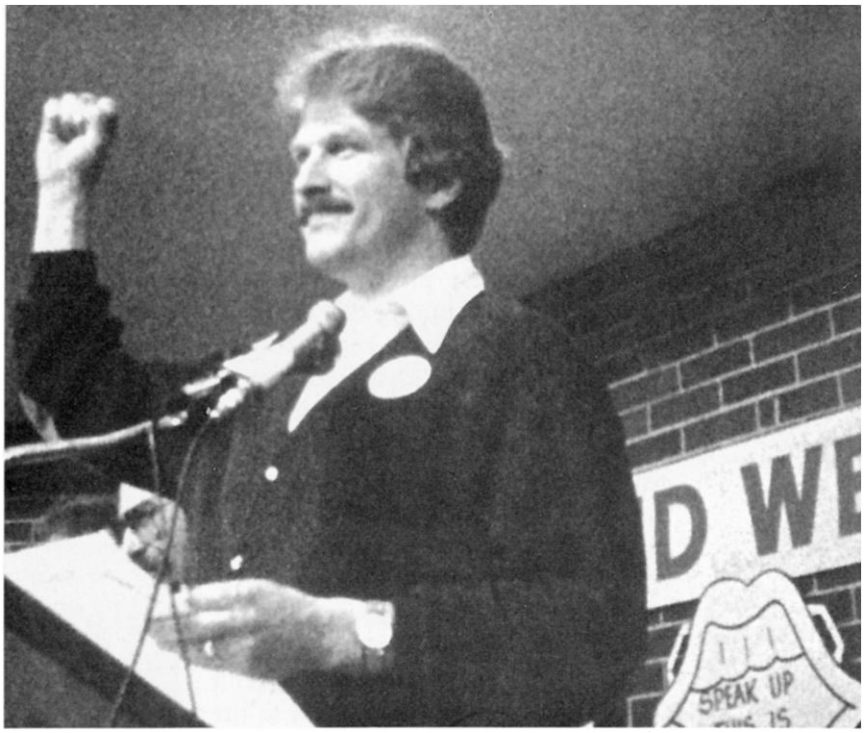
Documentary and the Power

Nonfiction films rarely reach beyond a small, devoted congregation, but in recent years two works in particular have realized a mass audience—Barbara Kopple's Academy Award-winning *American Dream* (1991) and Michael Moore's widely celebrated and controversial film, *Roger and Me* (1989). That they have gained this wide audience speaks first of all to the fact that both films deal with the fate of the worker at the hands of the modern corporation, a subject that has been the focus of public concern for more than a decade, inflected most recently by the predicaments of postindustrialism: Given the new order of global capitalism, what power can labor unions claim against management? and what responsibility has management toward workers and their communities? Yet despite these similarities in subject matter—both films also happen to deal with plant closings in the beleaguered Midwest—the two could hardly be more different, stylistically and rhetorically.

Kopple works within the relatively traditional documentary forms that Bill Nichols calls expository and observational; *American Dream* conforms to our customary documentary expectations as viewers that we are comfortably in the hands of an all-seeing, all-sympathizing film-maker, expectations that have been part of the documentary mode since its inception in the late nineteenth century. Exercising the authority of observation (an authority that is visible in ethnography, sociology, and psychiatric observation as well), the documentary film-maker establishes an ethical norm that is implicit in the narrative and that we are asked to identify with: we are "for" the victims of oppression. But the ethics of this mode, and of Kopple's film in particular, are not quite this simple.

Stylistically altogether different from Kopple's film, Moore's *Roger and Me* eschews the tradition of observational documentary and opts instead for a more complex rhetoric, a hybridization of (again in Nichols' terms) the interactive and the reflexive modes.[1] Moore does not invent this mode—it has its precedents in several other projects dating at least from Kit Carson and Jim McBride's quasi-documentary, *David Holzman's Diary* (1968)—but he carries the form well beyond its predecessors to the level of significant social commentary. What is especially in-

Film of Interrogation



American Dream & *Roger and Me*

teresting about *American Dream* and *Roger and Me* is their concern, in quite different ways, with power, not only the power—or powerlessness—of the worker but the power of the film-maker. For in describing the predicament of the worker, Kopple and Moore also portray, at times inadvertently, at other times explicitly, the situation of the film-maker, and implicitly they invite our speculation on the authority and power of the documentary media.

Kopple's *American Dream* deals with the 1985 strike of the meatpackers union (Local P-9) at the Hormel plant in Austin, Minnesota, a strike that results from the workers' outrage at the accumulated cuts in Hormel's incentive programs, benefits, and hourly wages—from $10.69 an hour to $8.25. Eventually, Hormel offers to freeze wages at $10 per hour for three years (with new hires at $8), but the union rejects the offer by 93%, fueled in part by their knowledge that the company has reaped over $29 million in profits in 1984, the year the cuts begin. While this seems like a relatively clear and morally solid position for the P-9 workers to occupy—they are claiming their right to a just wage against the seeming greed of the corporation—things get more and more complicated as Kopple's film unfolds.

Four principal figures emerge as the strike progresses, each with his own constituency and goals: the soft-spoken union president, Jim Guyette, who is determined to win at any cost; a union consultant hired by Guyette—Ray Rogers—who brings unrelenting optimism to the struggle; Lewie Anderson, the parent union's chief negotiator, who works against the local in wanting to rationalize wages across the whole union in order to maintain the industry's consistency and competitiveness (Hormel is already at the top end of the scale); and John Morrison, a leading dissident worker who criticizes the local union's leadership and sides with the national. Kopple traces the trajectory of

the strike, from its optimistic beginnings to its depressing conclusion: Hormel shifts production to other plants, and their premier product, Spam—produced during this crisis by Hormel management—keeps rolling out of the factory. With armed escorts, scab workers enter the plants, including some of the disaffected union members who have reached the limit of their own endurance. Ultimately, the parent union cuts all benefits to the strikers (previously $40 a week), strips Guyette of his position, and negotiates a contract that fixes wages at $10.25, but only for those who cross the line. With no guarantee of job restoration to the strikers, only 20% of the workers are finally called back, and in the 25th week of the strike—400 replacements having been hired—no jobs remain.

"What dignity is there when you don't have a job?"

—Union negotiator *American Dream*

What gives *American Dream* its power is the gradual unfolding of this defeat and the even-handedness with which Kopple serves as witness to what amounts to a tragic spectacle (as William Faulkner once defined it), in which the major union protagonists, all trying to do good in different ways, all fail. Union leader Guyette finds his confidence in labor's united power to be misplaced; the consultant likewise can't mobilize support to vanquish the intransigent managers and he rides off into the setting sun like a failed Lone Ranger. Kopple's postscript tells us that the national negotiator (Lewie Anderson) is fired from his negotiating job, but he goes on (as if to resolve the dilemma he had himself habitually faced) to lead a reform movement against union concessions. Hormel is the real winner: following the strike's conclusion, Hormel leases half its plant to another company, a shadow company, that pays its workers $6 an hour. Nothing can stop the Spam.

Kopple's *American Dream* comprises many elements that are familiar in the tradition of the strike narrative—whether fiction or nonfiction. There is the small union, pitting its force against the giant corporation and the problem of keeping the ranks together; there is the ambiguous role of the outside organizer (personified by Rogers), and the question of whether he does more good than ill. There is the moral dilemma of the dissident, who might turn scab; and the problem of feeding a family during a prolonged strike. There is the use of local law enforcement officers—not to mention the National Guard—as tools of capital. More problematically, there is the distinction between what is legal and what is moral. Guyette claims the morality of rebellion when he invokes the history of the American revolution (not itself "legal," as he points out) and the history of unionism. Against that position, sacred to the American left, Kopple posits the seeming pragmatism (cloaking self-interest) of the American right, as voiced by a Hormel secretary who is kept from her job for one day because of the striker's blockade and declares, with angry simplicity: "I don't want to discuss moralities; is what the company is doing legal?" And in the end, there is the problem of what constitutes defeat, what victory. Do moral victories transcend matters of economic survival? Or is Anderson right when he asks, "What dignity is there when you don't have a job?"

All of this takes place within the framing irony of the nature of work in the Hormel plant: the opening shots of the film establish the brutal regime of meat slaughtering, and these images of violence recur at intervals, so that we may wonder whether Kopple has at times an even broader point to make about the dignity or indignity of this work in the first place. We are made to empathize with workers who are simply seeking an honest pay for an honest day's work, but that day's work happens to involve stunning, decapitating, dismembering, and disemboweling all these defenseless animals.

Despite its linkage to the main line of strike narratives, the overall tone of *American Dream* is markedly different from that tradition and different too from Kopple's own earlier *Harlan County* (which also won an Academy Award for Best Feature Documentary, in 1976). And that difference sadly measures the distance labor has traveled in the last 15 years. The classic ending to the strike narrative—dating at least to the 1930s—represents the particular conflict as part of a longer march, an ongoing struggle that the worker is destined, even predestined, to win. Such was the structure of *Harlan County*, in which the 1974 coal-miners' strike is placed within a historical chronicle that gives it an inevitable logic in an unabashedly progressive narrative: the miners, members of the United Mine Workers Union, stage a strike at Brookside (Kentucky) in which the moral courage of the miners—and their wives, who seem crucial to the energy and direction of the strike—is unwavering as they confront the

legal violence of the corporation's gun thugs. As one old woman in *Harlan County*—a veteran of the 1930s—puts it: "If I get shot, they can't shoot the union out of me." In *Harlan County*, the workers have a unity among themselves that, despite minor rivalries, seems unshakable and will, we feel, gradually gain its victories over the greed and callous selfishness of the corporation.

There is no such "happy" ending in *American Dream*: the union is shattered, the corporation—with its higher obligations to shareholders—moves forward like a juggernaut, seeking the cheapest labor market, wherever that may be. Yet Kopple, the teller, seems not to have fully recognized the point of the tale itself. Certainly her remarks about the film have framed it in the conventional terms of the lost battle within a longer, ultimately winning war: "Maybe you don't win every battle but each one changes you and makes you smarter," Kopple replied to an interviewer's question about the purpose of the concluding information on life after the strike. It was "meant to be moving, to be reflective about past generations and struggles, and to convey hope for the future."[2] Such hope is hard to find in the film itself, however. The local union seems shattered, at least as a union, the victim of a corporation that, with "the law" on its side, would stop at nothing to win its point; the major union protagonists in the struggle scatter. Precisely the unity of the coalminers is what's missing at Hormel's P-9.

Instead, what we have in *American Dream* is unionism in the trickle-down Age of Reagan, when the corporation's obligations are to shareholders and their profits, regardless of the consequences to local economies and local communities. Under the set of incentives available to the contemporary corporation, that company profits most which most ruthlessly seeks the cheapest labor market, in whatever country. Against such odds, the Hormel workers can, at best, swallow hard and accept pay cuts that allow them to keep their jobs—all this in the face of extravagant corporate profits and executive salaries. At worst—and it was the worst for the great majority of the Hormel strikers—they can tough it out and eventually move out, to wherever. No wonder the sad but powerful drama of *American Dream* lies in the internecine war within the union ranks as they differently come to grips with this no-win situation. This is the knife-edge reality of the labor struggle in the 1980s, and it accounts for the power and impact the film has had as a spectacle of contemporary labor's plight.

"If you want to come back, you keep your goddam mouth shut."

—Corporate negotiator *American Dream*

Yet one aspect of *American Dream* that has gone virtually unnoticed is in some ways the film's most important point, though it is a point that Kopple, understandably, is loath to admit. In telling her story, Kopple has, one ultimately realizes, as little access to the corporate management as does the union. The powerlessness of the filmmaker is analogous to the powerlessness of the union. When an interviewer, after the film's release, asked Kopple whether she had had the same access to management as she'd had to labor, the film-maker responded defensively, as if the objectivity of her picture were at stake: "We have an interview with Chuck Nyberg, Hormel's Executive Vice-President, and Richard Knowlton, the CEO. We also shot management press conferences and management interviews, but they always said the same thing." Of course they always said the same thing: they stonewalled Kopple's camera as they stonewalled the press and the union. But far from thinking she has been limited here, Kopple boasts about her ability to get inside the factory: "They knew who I was, but I wasn't blocked. In fact, I was one of the few people who got in the plant to film. I couldn't believe it." And she adds, not seeing the full implications, "But there weren't a lot of labor/management negotiations because the company wouldn't talk to them. They wouldn't even be in the same room with them, so they had arbitrators going back and forth."[3] Precisely. In the Reagan-Bush era, communication between management and worker takes place ideally through an intermediary. And when, on rare occasions, they are forced into face-to-face talk, management has the right to say things to the worker that make a mockery of the "negotiating" table. Kopple records one such moment, when a corporate negotiator answers a member of a union negotiating team who has complained a little too long about certain issues: "If you want to come back, you keep your goddam mouth shut."

Kopple's camera is thus witness to what the filmmaker herself can hardly admit: that management controls the discourse and can exclude or limit her presence from the decision-making process as much as it can the worker's. In the face of this cinematic deficit, Kopple falls back tirelessly on interviews with

the more accessible workers, mercilessly probing *their* feelings, scoring most triumphantly when she can capture an otherwise tough, proud worker broken down to tears by the spectacle of his own powerlessness—which is driven home by Kopple's interrogation. To a worker who is about to cross the picket line and go against his union, she asks, solicitously (and gratuitously), "Is that hard for you?" To a scab, out of work for six years, and about to report for work, she asks, "Is it hard to cross the picket line?" At times like these, her function resembles management itself, with its power to manipulate the worker's responses.

Kopple reveals the film-maker's ruthless delight in the medium's power to capture the authenticity of intimate emotion.

Of course Kopple wants to expose the emotional traumas of the workers so that we might more fully empathize with them, but she will do so at the expense of other values, such as the privacy of the subject. In talking about a sequence that had to be cut out of the final version because of its length, Kopple unwittingly reveals the film-maker's ruthless delight in the medium's power to capture the authenticity of intimate emotion. She tells of sequences shot in Worthington, Minnesota (the site of an Armour plant), where a worker is shown feeling confident he can move to another job in another plant if need be, when suddenly his telephone rings. "A minute or two later he came out, looking very strange, and said, 'Cut.' *But we kept rolling as he sat down* and told his wife that he'd just been told they were selling all the Armour plants and that 'We won't be going anywhere,'" Kopple confesses [emphasis added]. "Both he and his wife burst into tears. He looked at her and said, 'What am I going to do? Meatpacking is all I know.' I shot *incredible* stuff in Worthington. . . . "[4]

Where management presents a shell too hard, too sophisticated, to penetrate, Kopple turns to the union, where she can work wonders, given her friendly status: "I had trouble sometimes with the international because they'd say, 'Union meetings are sacred. You can't be in there.' But I'm very persistent, so I'd give long speeches in front of all these packing-house guys as to why they should let me film their meetings. Some of them never got comfortable with it, and others sort of enjoyed it, or whatever."[5] On the question of whether or not her presence affected her subjects' behavior, adding "another dynamic to the events," Kopple straddles the issue, invoking in the end the mythology of documentary invisibility: "I guess it always does, but I think that for some of these meetings we were really insignificant and that they just forgot about us."[6] Such conclusions are comforting to the documentary film-maker (or photographer, or sociological interviewer), but they fail to take account of the real intervention that the outsider's presence entails, however well intentioned she or he may be. As Heisenberg might have said, the results of such "objective" acts are indeterminate.

There is no question that Kopple has revealed in *American Dream* the condition of labor-management relations in this country in a way that we have not seen so clearly before. But for all its virtues, it is important to recognize that Kopple's documentary mode is, in rhetorical terms, squarely in the mainstream of the tradition, a function that has, from its beginnings in the work of photographer Jacob Riis, offered us the implicit spectacle of a sympathetic observer, empowered by the camera technologies of observation, picturing the powerless for the information (and often entertainment) of the more powerful. Kopple extends that tradition without essentially questioning it.

It is precisely the questioning of that tradition that Michael Moore accomplishes in his brilliantly conceived *Roger and Me*. Moore's film, his first, came out in the fall of 1989 and was met with both critical acclaim and—rare for a documentary—popular success. It seemed, in fact, a sure bet for the Academy Award, until an interview in *Film Comment* with Harlan Jacobson started its derailment by questioning Moore on what appeared to be certain factual misrepresentations.[7] Pauline Kael's subsequent *New Yorker* review raised similar questions and attacked more particularly the film's putative assumption of superiority toward its subjects, and the movie has been slightly, though I would argue unfairly, tainted ever since.[8] It's impossible now to discuss *Roger and Me* without taking into account some of these objections, but Moore's critics have, I think, asked the wrong questions of the film, failing to assess accurately its purpose. We *should* worry about whether Moore has violated the ethics of documentary—a question I want to come back to—but we must also observe the degree

to which Moore successfully interrogates the whole premise of traditional documentary form that Kopple, incidentally, accepts.

The ostensible subject of *Roger and Me* is the plant closings of the 1980s by General Motors and their effect on the company town of Flint, Michigan. Like Kopple, Moore is sympathetic to the workers' predicament and to the whole plight of the city: throughout the film, recurring like a leitmotif, he shows us countless evictions being carried out by the local deputy sheriff—the door forced open, the victim's unavailing protests, household goods piled on the street curb, the search for a van or car. He shows us boarded-up stores on Main Street; unoccupied houses, vacant and dilapidated; a rat population in Flint that outnumbers the human population by 50,000. He interviews a former GM employee, temporarily deranged by the situation, shooting baskets outside a local mental health institution.

Moore sacrifices historical accuracy in order to achieve the unity of satiric fiction.

And to some extent Moore's story is the same as Kopple's: the worker is caught between a corporate management with nothing but profits on its mind and a national union leadership all too understanding of management's needs. At the final closing of the Flint truck assembly line, only four UAW members show up to demonstrate, as opposed to the thousands promised by the union earlier. One of Moore's workers puts the new situation of labor succinctly: "Why is the union getting weak? We're losing power. . . . Too many guys are friends with management." When Moore asks Owen Bieber (UAW President) whether a sit-down strike would do any good today in Flint—Flint was the site of the historic 44-day sit-down strike in 1936 out of which the UAW was born in 1937—he replies that the sit-down is not relevant today. "We have to accept reality that the plants are not going to remain open," he says.

What makes *Roger and Me* unusual—and what has left it open to criticism and misunderstanding—is its mix of motives, its hybridization of forms: it is part historical narrative, focusing on the fate of Flint, Michigan, following the GM plant closings, and dealing with the workers' plight (which invites our interest in the factual history of this "action"); but it is also part autobiography, beginning with childhood footage and first-person narration by the film-maker. And it is Michael Moore himself who remains the central figure throughout the film, in the persona of the reporter in search of his story, the interviewer in search of his subject. Jacobson questions the factual inaccuracies in the film, and he is of course right to do so. Plant closings that actually took place over a decade or more seem to take place in a more condensed period of time, about two years. Still, none of these misrepresentations of chronology, and there are many others, makes any real difference to the central point of the film; no one disputes the fact of the plant closings and their effects. Moore has sacrificed historical accuracy in order to achieve the unity of satiric fiction. The exposition in *Roger and Me* is really its least important aspect: we are most struck by the film-maker's presence as interviewer and as self-conscious maker of the film. These are the parts of the film that Pauline Kael objects to, especially what she takes to be Moore's targetting of the working class for his satire from a position of presumed moral superiority, all the time seeming to be sympathetic to them. This is a criticism that one might think twice about, since we naturally feel that if a work is making moral judgments, it must be better than what it judges. Kael is offended at the ridiculing tone of the movie, its depiction, for example, of people working in various elite establishments who are forced (by virtue of those jobs) to expel Moore from the premises as he searches for Roger Smith; they are made to seem flunkies, she says. But it's hard to see the point of her criticisms: if they are flunkies, they are simply doing their job. Meanwhile, the GM workers in the film are consistently treated without a trace of condescension: their comments are pithy, their anger is controlled. "What would you say to Roger Smith," Moore asks several GM workers at one point. "Roger Smith?" is the reply. "I'd tell him to retire." "He should be feeling guilty," says another. "I'm sick and tired of these damn fat cats."

Those whom Moore does ridicule (and there are indeed many) are simply given enough rope to hang themselves with. Unlike Kael, I don't feel sorry for Miss Michigan (and Miss America), 1988, when she says on camera, when asked how it feels to drive through Flint when so many workers have been fired from the auto plants—"I feel like a big supporter. . . ." What is all too obviously (and incongruously) on her mind is the upcoming beauty contest: "Pray for my victory in Atlantic City in two weeks." And I don't

feel sorry for the woman on social security who cuddles one of her rabbits (she sells them for "Pets or Meat") and coos at it with demonic good humor: "What's gonna happen to him? He's gonna be eaten. He's gonna be the supper on our supper table." Moments later, the rabbit is clubbed and skinned.

Throughout, Moore views skeptically those possessing power, both the unfamous and the famous. Flint's famous son, Bob Eubanks ("The Newlywed Game"), is shown at a town fair doing a local version of the big show and, offstage but not off-camera, offers these jokes to Moore: "Why don't Jewish women get AIDS? Because they marry assholes, they don't screw 'em." Several ladies of the leisure class playing golf at the Flint country club offer Moore's deadpan camera the force of their bromidic wisdom when they say, "We have such a good welfare program here . . . they [the poor, the unemployed] just don't want to work." Again and again, Moore's deadpan camera observes the absurdities of Flint's upper-crust society, as in the "Great Gatsby Party"—for which the host hires several unemployed persons to pose as human statues. The new Gatsby's guests offer us further platitudes from the entrepreneur's toast book: "Get up in the morning and go do something. . . . Start yourself, get your own motor going!" How can one incriminate a film-maker who exposes the extraordinary obtuseness of a society that holds a grand party to celebrate the opening of a new jail in Flint, including jailhouse pajamas, dancing to "Jailhouse Rock," and lockup for the night in a brand-new cell: "We're having a fantastic time here." Moore captures the culture of a new aristocracy whose pastorals beggar the imagination of conventional courtiers playing at shepherd and shepherdess. In short, one wonders why Kael should have found Moore—whose family has worked for General Motors or other automobile industries for generations—superior or hostile to the working class. His subject is power—its arrogance and stupidity—and his examples make the film as much an indictment of American society in general as a study of Flint's particular problems.

It is the admixture of Moore himself as a kind of comic persona in the film that has created the special virtues of *Roger and Me* and also its special problems. Seeing the traditional subject of the film (a plant closing and its effect on the community), the viewer expects "truth"; but much of what Moore delivers is not the "straight" truth of documentary but the oblique truth of satire.[9] And are not documentary and satire opposite modes, representing contrary motivations? We expect "truth" from documentary; we don't expect it in quite the same literal way from satire. "Documentary satire" is almost, then, an oxymoron, unless we are willing to admit it as a strikingly original hybrid—which is what I would argue is the case with *Roger and Me*. Once we view the film as "documentary satire," Kael's problems with it seem peevish.

Kopple's camera reveals the nature of powerlessness, but it conceals the awful silence of the powerful.

What makes *Roger and Me* work is the unabashedly autobiographical nature of the film, its whimsical self-indulgence and seemingly absurd structure—the quest for an interview with Roger Smith, the chief executive of General Motors. At the center of *Roger and Me*, glowing with a kind of negative aura and repellent charisma, is Roger Smith, chairman of General Motors, whose refusal to be interviewed by Moore for his documentary makes him the defining "presence" of the film, all the more tantalizing for being absent virtually throughout. As Moore tries literally to find his subject, he keeps approaching the goal only to be thrown unceremoniously off the field by Smith's various guards and gatekeepers. Moore's tracking effort is carefully documented on film: in the General Motors main headquarters, given the runaround by public relations staff, Moore fails to get into the elevators and off the ground floor; at the Grosse Point Yacht Club he is shown the door; he is ushered out by an officious manager at the Detroit Athletic Club. He can't even get to talk with the company's "spokesperson" on the last day of the Flint plant. Pointing his camera at her (inside the building) from his position outside, Moore records her line: "It's a very sad time," she says, simulating feeling. "A very private personal time. . . . " And when Moore presses her to speak (she is, after all, GM's "spokesperson"), she says, "You don't represent anybody. You're a private interest and I will not speak to you." "We're citizens of the community," Moore protests, to no avail. (The key word, "community," seems almost an anachronism here.) The spokesperson signals to her police force to escort Moore, once more, from the private property of a publicly owned corporation. Moore does get an open mike during a GM stockholders' meeting, posing as a shareholder; but when Smith recognizes his man—

evidently he has not been unaware of Moore's persistent efforts—he quickly closes the meeting before the dazed film-maker can utter a word. (Is he really dazed? It's hard to tell.) Moore's camera picks up the chit-chat immediately afterwards: "I think he didn't know what what the hell to do," Smith and his associate murmur to one another conspiratorially.

Moore does succeed, finally, in achieving a face-to-face confrontation with Roger Smith when he corners the executive, following the latter's unctuously avuncular Christmas speech at a General Motors party. It is the climax we think we've been waiting for, and it is, appropriately, an anticlimax, a reiteration of the film's point about the powerful and the powerless. "Will you come to Flint and see the evictions that are going on as a result of GM's plant closings," Moore asks, like Parzival who has at last found the Holy Grail. "I'm sure GM didn't evict them. I don't know anything about it..." the Grail replies, and shuffles off disdainfully.

Moore turns the tables on traditional documentary: he himself becomes the "powerless" subject.

With this game of cat and mouse, Moore is making, implicitly, a powerful point about documentary form. Too easily, for a hundred years, creators of documentary (in various media) have made the powerless their subject. Arriving on the scene with still camera, movie camera, or tape recorder (that is, armed with the accoutrements of technologically advanced civilization), the documentarian has essentially not allowed his subject to choose whether or not to comply with his efforts. Often the efforts are presumed by the creator to be for the benefit of the subject, and sometimes the point is driven home to the subject in the form of money payment. Exposing the subject's "plight," the creator of the documentary feels virtuous and we, the viewer, likewise feel the glow of virtue, even if we do nothing, and say only that our "attitude" has changed. By pointing his camera at the unequal power and authority of those making the decisions, Moore turns the tables on the traditional documentary form: he himself, the man with the camera, becomes the "powerless" subject (and serves as an analogue to the powerless worker as well).[10] Showing us a Roger Smith who doesn't "have to" be subjected to Moore's camera, who is savvy enough to avoid it or powerful enough to wall himself off with guards and "spokespersons," Moore is making a devastating point about democracy and industrial policy: the powerful do not have to speak to "us," they owe us nothing. Kopple is much more traditional in this respect, directing her inquiries to the victims only, asking the strikers, "How do you feel?" Moore is essentially not interested in how the worker "feels," or how "hard" it is to undergo this process; when he shows us "victimized" workers, he is not working to solicit our empathy; it is assumed. Instead, Moore acts as a satirist and critic, exposing the moral failures of the powerful by placing them before the camera's deadpan gaze, accompanied by Moore's own disarmingly ingenuous interlocutory style.

The closest Moore comes to Smith, in a way, is through his lobbyist, Tom Kay, who seems quite willing to talk with the filmmaker, although what he has to say may seem slightly biased: "I'm sure Roger Smith has as much social conscience as anyone in this country." (We learn in a satisfyingly ironic postscript that Kay ultimately loses his own job.) But actually Kay also supplies a point that the film does not attempt to refute—"GM has *no* obligation to Flint"—and it's a telling one, threatening in some ways Moore's whole premise: Why this heavy burden of guilt imposed on GM? In a free-market economy, where no incentives exist for industry to remain in a given locale, where in fact the incentives go the other way—to relocate in the cheapest labor market—we can see the point. (The greater good of the international consumer must, so the argument goes, outweigh the temporary losses of the individual worker and the community—or even the country.) So what if Flint now has the highest crime rate on the continent? GM is trying to compete profitably in a world market; *that* is its purpose, not to supply jobs to Flint workers. And it doesn't serve Flint if GM goes out of business altogether. If what is happening in Flint is symptomatic of what is happening all over America, the fault lies with forces that are much larger, even, than General Motors, which functions within an economic system it did not create. Moore's neglect of the macroeconomic issue in his film may be a more serious problem finally than the worries about chronology, although to include it would have blunted his criticism of General Motors.

And yet, implicit in *Roger and Me* is an even larger social economic point: that the same high-handed evasiveness on the part of Smith and the GM management generally is *the whole problem* in the

first place. American corporate management has never listened to the man or woman on the assembly line, has not wanted to acknowledge that they even have a human presence. Following the logic of Taylorism as defined by American industry ("a great art form," someone calls it at the Flint Gatsby party), the worker is a cipher, most valued when he most approaches an automaton. From such attitudes, quality control circles (and quality cars) do not come. And it has taken the example of the Japanese system, with its greater attention to what the worker on the line can contribute to the whole system, to teach American industry—slowly—something. Moreover, GM did in fact help create the larger forces, by lobbying for laws that promote its own corporate self-interest. And if we accept the legitimacy of GM, we accept as legitimate the destruction of our national economy in the name of "profit"; we accept the destruction of our communities in the name of creating private wealth.

Finally, where Moore goes far beyond Kopple is in creating an image of American life in the late twentieth century, in which the shift from an industrial to a postindustrial economy is fumbled miserably, with an awkwardness and absurdity that is both funny and pathetic: Flint tries desperately to survive the demise of its industrial base by recreating itself as a tourist attraction, that is, by turning the production of consumer goods into a story about the production of consumer goods. But it doesn't work. Consumerism and artifice, the creation of an economy of the "simulacrum," as Baudrillard would put it, collapses in on itself. The rabbit is eaten for supper. The last car rolls off the assembly line. "I cannot come to Flint," says the corporate Pecksniff.

Kopple shows us that there are no easy victories, possibly no victories at all, for labor to celebrate at the end of the twentieth century. Moore shows us why: the corporate Father has turned out his sons and shut the door on their imploring voices. Bearing witness in their quite different ways, Kopple and Moore help us a little, at least, to understand such things or to clarify what we won't accept. Kopple's camera reveals the nature of powerlessness and gives it a voice, but it conceals the awful silence of the powerful. And that silence, absurd in its pomposity, infuriating in its Kafkesque reticence, is exactly what Moore shows us. We have no power against it, except ridicule and irony.[11]

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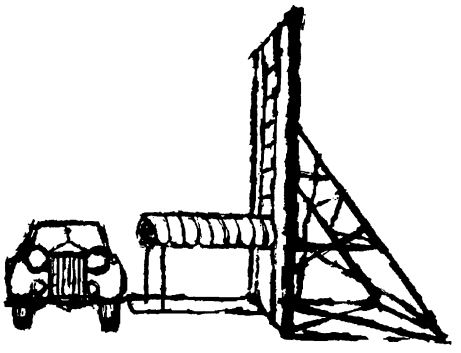
Notes

Thanks to my colleague Jay Ruby, who shared some of his thoughts about the films with me at an early stage of my work.

1. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 32–33.
2. Gary Crowdus and Richard Porton, "*American Dream*: An Interview with Barbara Kopple," *Cineaste* 18, no. 4 (1991), p. 38.
3. Crowdus and Porton, p. 38.
4. Ibid., p. 38.
5. Ibid., p. 37.
6. Ibid., p. 37.
7. Harlan Jacobson, "Michael and Me" [an interview with Michael Moore], *Film Comment* 25, no. 6 (Nov.–Dec. 1989), pp. 16–26.
8. Pauline Kael, "The Current Cinema: Melodrama/Cartoon/Mess," *The New Yorker,* January 8, 1990, p. 91.
9 The autobiographical form has been used before in a documentary film, and also with great comic effect. See, for example, Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March* (1985), a film that begins as a documentary about Sherman and the South and soon develops into a quest for the filmmaker's soulmate. Another antecedent of Moore is Mike Rubbo's *Waiting for Fidel,* which portrays the filmmaker's failed pursuit of his subject (after having been promised an interview).
10. I do not mean to argue that Moore is literally powerless. He is the film-maker, creating a product with a clear point of view, guiding our judgment through the manipulation of his materials. Moore's power is a relative one: relative to Smith, in the situations depicted on film, it is nil; relative to Smith, in the movie theater, it is triumphant.
11. Unfortunately, the short sequel to *Roger and Me,* created in the wake of the film's success, is an embarrassing piece of self-congratulation on Moore's part, suggesting that Moore's compulsive self-revelation has not only a luminous side but a self-destructive component as well.



Fatimah Tobing Rony

Victor Masayesva, Jr., and the Politics of *Imagining Indians*

"Refraining from photographing certain subjects," writes Hopi photographer, video artist, and film-maker Victor Masayesva, Jr., "has become a kind of worship."[1] Masayesva's statement on restricting what can be photographed would appear to tread dangerously close to censorship, violating one of the basic tenets of Western democracy: that the health of a state can be gauged by the degree to which it tolerates the free flow of information, both textual and visual. The conviction that all people should have the liberty to appropriate and disseminate information pertains as much to the media journalist's right to expose corrupt politicians as it does to the right of academicians such as anthropologists and historians to publish data on the people and events that they study. In stark contrast, the importance of *not* photographing certain subjects, whether profane or sacred, is a central theme of Masayesva's extraordinary oeuvre, a body of work which includes photography, experimental community-based videos, and film, such as his recent *Imagining Indians* (1992), a work which slyly juxtaposes excerpts from Hollywood Westerns with interviews with Native and Euro-Americans about popular media representations of Native Americans.

Photographing Native Americans is a favorite American pastime. Since the invention of photography in 1840, the oneiric quality of photographs (such as those by Edward Sheriff Curtis) of lone, feather-bonneted, tomahawk-wielding Native-American warriors on horses peering over cliffs, their bodies seemingly dissolving into the foggy mists, has delighted non-Native Americans, who accepted such images as the epitome of authenticity. The American myth of nostalgic origins was and continues to be embodied by the image of the Indian as a "vanishing race." Since its inception, the age of mechanical reproduction has been accompanied by a fascination for the images and actual bodies of indigenous peoples. Besides photography, media "cannibalizations" of Indians have included such forms of popular science and history entertainment as "native villages" in World's Fairs, Buffalo Bill Wild West Shows, natural-history-museum bone displays and dioramas such as the greeting of Captain John Smith by Pocahontas (still to be

"Buffalo Boys": Portrait of two young buffalo dancers from Masayesva's book *Hopi Photographers/ Hopi Images*

seen at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History), stereographs and postcards, and cigar-store Indian kitsch.

From *The Last of the Mohicans* to *Ishi: The Last of the Yahi Indians*, the vision of Native Americans as being "Last of . . . " is a profound part of the American consciousness. Romanticized as the Noble Savage struggling to survive in the wild, the popular image of the Native American is taken for real: as when the barker outside the fair tent calls potential spectators to come in and "see *real* Indians," or continuing today in the excitement over Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* (1991) as a film with *real* Lakota Indians. The rapaciousness of such media cannibalism has had a profound political influence on Native societies which have fought against land dispossession, dislocation, genocide, and colonialism. After his discovery as a teenager that his father's bones were on display at the American Museum of Natural History, Minik Wallace, the only survivor of six Smith Sound Inuit

brought to the U.S. by Admiral Robert Peary in 1896, said:

> No one can know [the sad feelings I have] unless they have been taken from their home and had their father die and put on exhibition, and be left to starve in a strange land where the men insult you when you ask for your own dear father's body to bury or to be sent home. These are the civilized men who steal, and murder, and torture, and pray and say "Science."[2]

Seen as without *history*, technology, and archives—in other words as *ethnographic*—of an earlier era, taxidermically frozen into timeless picturesques, Native Americans were represented as ignorant of photographic and film technology, their purported ignorance lending authenticity to their presence on film. Because they were seen as of a "vanishing race," photography and film came to be seen as media of scientific preservation, rendering the Native American the most circulated, cannibalized, and yet most invisible of peoples.

Shooting with the Camera: Photography and Video

Masayesva is extremely conscious of his own problematic position as an artist using the media most closely associated with Euro-American appropriation and exploitation. The process of gaining community trust, as many Native-American photographers and film-makers have attested, is a difficult and slow task. "You're going to be one of those people who look up our dresses," one elderly woman admonished Blackfoot film-maker George Burdeau when he first began filming in Native-American communities.[3] In a recent interview with me, Masayesva explained that as a resident of Hotevilla his position is different from that of a non-Native photographer because of the fact that his community knows his family and his clan.[4] Educated on scholarships to the elite Horace Mann prep school in New York City and Princeton University, Masayesva returned to Hotevilla to make photography and video: having roots in a community and a sense of historical continuity were to him essential prerequisites to representing his own people. One is reminded of Frantz Fanon's essay on national culture, in which Fanon stresses the necessity that the artist be from and work within a community:

> A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature. . . . A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence.

Instead of a teleological account of the past, Fanon telescopes the past into the present and the future. He explains,

> The formula "This all happened long ago" is substituted with that of "What we are going to speak of happened somewhere else, but it might well have happened here today, and it might happen tomorrow."[5]

The gap between conventional Euro-American notions of History and a plural notion of histories is also brought to relief in a fascinating debate conducted in 1971 between Margaret Mead and James Baldwin at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. For Mead, a film camera "running on its own steam" without any human intervention was the best way to record the unfolding of events: history was a linear temporal process that could be captured on film.[6] James Baldwin, on the other hand, rejected not only the anthropological discourse which represented people of color as "savages"—as informative vestiges of a Darwinian evolutionary past—but also Mead's notion of rational, linear History. Here is a small excerpt from their exchange:

Mead:	No, you see, I do not accept that I have done things because I dreamt about them.
Baldwin:	But I had to accept that I was on a slave boat once.
Mead:	No.
Baldwin:	But I was.
Mead:	Wait, you were not. Look, you don't believe in reincarnation?
Baldwin:	But my whole life was defined by history . . . my life was defined by the time I was five by the history written on my brow.[7]

For Baldwin, history was a question of tracing effects *felt in the present*: the history of racialization, the history of a people, the personal history of individuals, and the necessity to bear witness for the future.

Masayesva's notion of history has more affinities with that of Baldwin than with that of Mead. Yet Masayesva does not deny the ability of photography to give testimony to the past. As he explained to me, "I wouldn't know my grandfather if not for photography, because I never met him and I saw him in [a photograph of] a Snake Dance. So that's how I've met him." The Hopi Snake Dance became the most photographed and filmed Native-American dance as a result of the emergence of the Southwest as a tourist attraction after the opening of the Atcheson, Topeka, and the Santa Fe Railroad in 1880. Its popularity may perhaps be attributed to the Judeo-Christian associations of snakes to Satan which conjured up the Hopi as dancing Antichrists. Ironically, Masayesva reclaims these images as the site where he may "meet" his grandfather.

To Masayesva, photography, film, and video provide a "closer" means of communication than does language. As he explained to me:

> I understand the risks I'm taking. But beyond that it's not as *separate* as you might think. I think that what's farther is words and sentences.... Our communication is mostly visually transmitted, whether it's in ceremonies, rituals where we reenact our histories, how we came to be and why we are set up the way we are. That's how our information is transmitted besides our oral histories. I think using words and pictures in context: that's not so far. I think *words* and sentences are totally far.

Photography as a direct means of visual communication is evident, for example, in one black-and-white photograph by Masayesva in which two young buffalo dancers with painted faces and chests and horned headdresses stand in front of a barbed-wire fence, facing forward but looking in different directions. The hands of one young man are raised and hold onto the fence and one hand also grips a rattle, while the lowered hands of the other man appear to hold a bone or an antler. Behind the men is a young woman in jeans and a T-shirt squatting on the ground looking at the camera. By placing the camera so that the barbed-wire fence with its triangular pattern dominates the foreground—while a third set of eyes looks on in the background—Masayesva has already upset the traditional picturesque photograph of the dancing Hopi which posits itself as an unmediated window onto reality. As clowns, the young men are not there to merely entertain but to educate and admonish, and are caught between the fence and the young woman, with a jutting mesa in the background: the moment is one of stasis, triangular balance in the three pairs of eyes, but a balance which is off-kilter, threatening to be upset by the slightest movement.

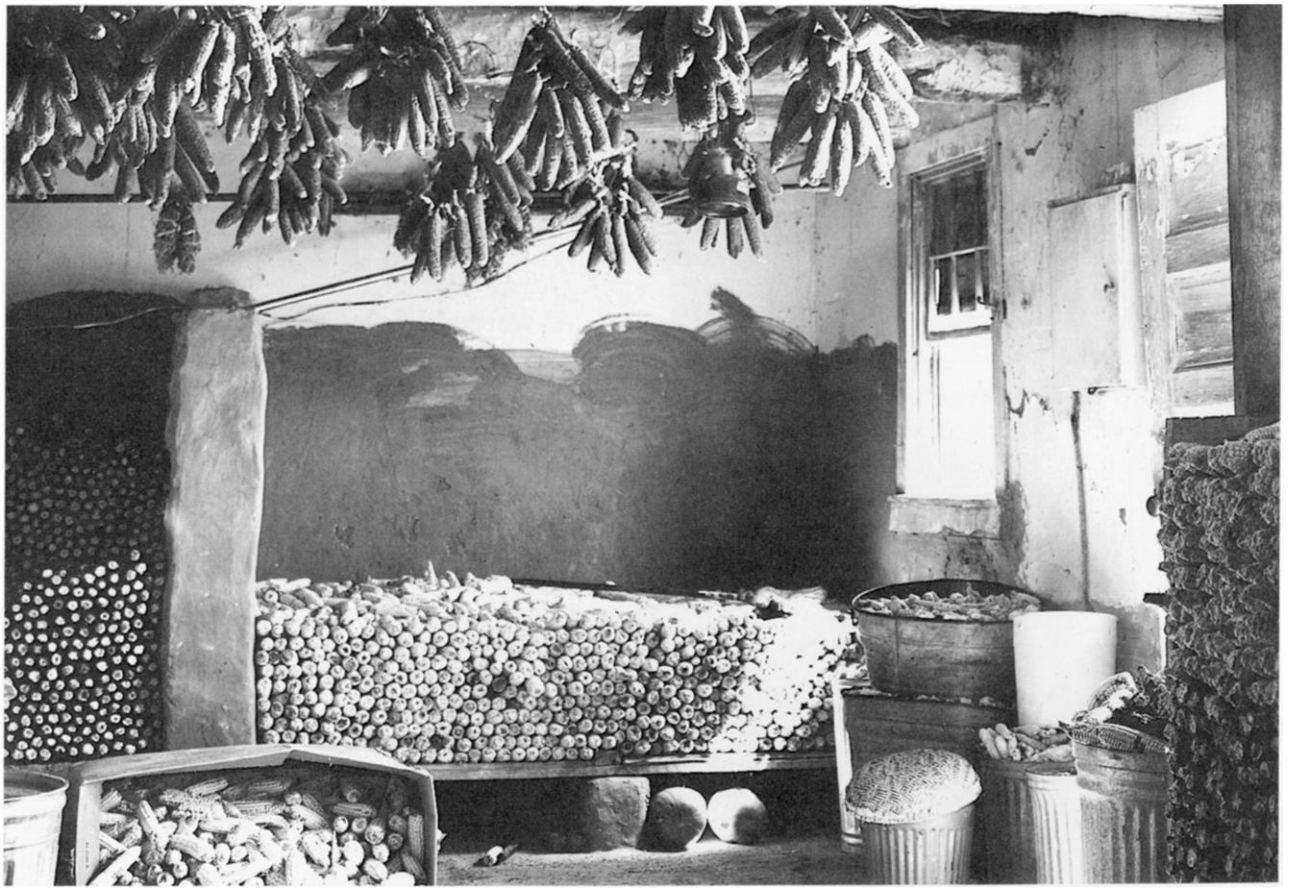
The precarious balance of seeming opposites underlies another black-and-white photograph of an otherwise bare room full of dried corn: corn hangs from the ceiling beams, spills onto the floor, and is stacked above the ground in neat piles. The title of the poem which accompanies the photo, however, is "Famine":

> Flies shelled and husked by the blowing sand
> It was a windy year
>
> We dug our cornplants out of the sand
> And lived on watermelon seeds
>
> There was a lot that we ate that year
> In the winter-time we ate our children

The combination of text and photographic image is a common element in Masayesva's work: the photograph does not merely illustrate but exists as an independent message, and its meaning often cuts against the text, adding opacity and abstraction. The oscillation in the poem between images of food and famine, and the last line, moving from seeming abundance to eating "our children," reveal the violent, necessarily intertwined balance between life and death which, as Masayesva explains, is integral to photography:

> Photography reveals to me how it is that life and death can be so indissolubly one; it reveals the falseness of maintaining these opposites as separate. Photography is an affirmation of opposites; the negative contains the positive.[8]

The shallowness of Mead's conception of a "camera running on its own steam" as a positivist mode of recording is exposed by Masayesva, who besides using text with his photographs also manipulates his photographs with layers of paint, adding layers of



"Famine": Photograph accompanying poem "Famine" in *Hopi Photographers/Hopi Images*

history. His concern over the raiding of Native-American images, ideas, and objects not only by popular culture but also by the world of so-called high art underlies the humor of his color photograph "Southwest Bouquet" (1991). This photograph of coyote carcasses not only takes as its subject matter the coyote, the trickster figure in many Southwest Native cultures, but in the painted-on addition of African violets slyly pokes fun at the flowery purple-saturated paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe. "Southwest Bouquet" is a photograph of desiccation and appropriation, a comment on the "romantic Primitivism," as George W. Stocking, Jr., put it, of non-Native artists like O'Keeffe, D.H. Lawrence, and others, who beginning in the 1920s came to Native-American regions of the Southwest to reinvigorate their own jaded modernism, but who more often than not saw the Native cultures and peoples that inspired them as primeval backdrop.[9]

The self-righteousness of academics over the necessity of conducting "salvage ethnography," collecting ethnographic data on "vanishing" indigenous peoples seen as too "primitive" to be able to record their own histories, has been attacked by many Native Americans, who feel that certain information must be *earned* by the initiated. Masayesva told me of a German linguist recently thwarted in his desire to publish a book on the Hopi sacred trails into the Grand Canyon. This linguist had reprimanded the Hopi, telling them "You people don't seem to know about it." But as Masayesva pointed out, the fact that nobody talked about the sacred trails was due to the fact that they were truly sacred, known only by the initiated. In Masayesva's "Canyonland-Doorways" (1988), Hopi

wedding shoes are changed into canyonland folds, with the image of a *sipapuni* (or "place of emergence," the kiva entrance) painted directly on the photograph. Direct understanding of this image is foiled.

On the other side of the linguist's argument is the struggle on the part of many Native-American groups to restrict access to certain ceremonies and information. As Masayesva confesses,

> I've grown up to be this old, and I accept the limitations. I know I'll never know what that society knows, because I'm not a member or because I'm born into a certain clan. I'm not going to go break down the walls to get to that information. I've grown up accepting my limitations. And that's hard for people who want to know everything, to dig into it, to dissect it, to see what it looks like.

Masayesva's passionate engagement in teaching history is evidenced by the educational videos for the Ethnic Heritage Program at Hotevilla which he began directing in 1980.[10] One of the most striking and beautiful videos of the series is *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* (*We, Someone the Hopi*) (1985).[11] Masayesva disrupts the standard documentary and ethnographic film tradition: the video provides no travelogue camera pan of an empty landscape with a tilt down to a Native village, but starts with a shot of the sneakered feet of a man who is filling buckets of water. At first we see only his legs, and when we are finally allowed to see his full body it is only in profile and in extreme long shot. The sound of the wind and the voice-over of Ross Macaya, an elderly member of the Hopi story-telling clan, explaining why he grew up without a father, begin this video which celebrates the Hopi tricentennial of the Pueblo revolt of 1680. Macaya tells the Emergence Story about the origin of the Hopi people, and it is deeply interconnected with prophecy, a history of becoming: young boys listen to Macaya in the kerosene-lit light, intercut with beautifully shot scenes of rain falling, close-ups of deer, spilling corn. The camera eye is quite different here, slow, moving through space, and disembodied, often at the height of a human or even a horse. The camera painstakingly zooms in and out of magnificent landscapes of deep color.

Itam Hakim, Hopiit was intended for a Hopi audience, unlike ethnographic films, which almost always posit the spectator as privileged Western outsider. The images of this film, such as a lone eagle in the falling rain, are so vivid that they have the force of dream. But it is clear that the images are also collective and culturally specific, and thus opaque to a non-Hopi audience. The video is also playful: Hopi resistance and the revolution of 1680, when the Pueblo peoples succeeded in driving out the Spanish, are accompanied by Spanish military music and illustrated with computer-manipulated images of Spanish conquistadors. These images manage to look simultaneously abstract, real, and searing. Macaya's own personal history, the emergence of the Hopi into the world, the colonial past, and the present are telescoped here, contingent and layered.

Masayesva's video seems to suggest that it is no longer necessary or even pertinent to reveal the body, defeating the expectations of the viewer accustomed to ethnographic film: the expected full body shot never materializes. In one sequence, for example, a row of Hopi adults and children are tilling the land in extreme long shot; we are not allowed to see their bodies up close. And in the final dance sequences by Hopis in Native costume as well as jeans and platform sandals, we are introduced to the dancers by shots of their heads or their feet, a reticence which prevents the audience from seeing and consuming everything. Thus the wholistic—cultural anthropology's traditional thirst for studying *whole* cultures—and the holistic—the New Age fascination with Native ceremonial rituals—are obfuscated in a clever and yet moving rendering of Hopi history.

Part of the history Masayesva is evoking here is the history of the representation of Hopi as racialized, ethnographic bodies. One particularly fascinating section of *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* scans turn-of-the-century photographs of Hopi dancers, sometimes settling briefly on certain sections of these sepia-toned photographs: again we are denied the "whole picture."[12] Like many Native film-makers and video makers, such as Dean Curtis Bear Claw, Fidel Moreno, Diane Reyna, and Edward Ladd, Masayesva does not so much repudiate as recontextualize archival photography, reclaiming his own histories from the museum's deep freeze of Native Americans as metonyms of a "timeless past."[13]

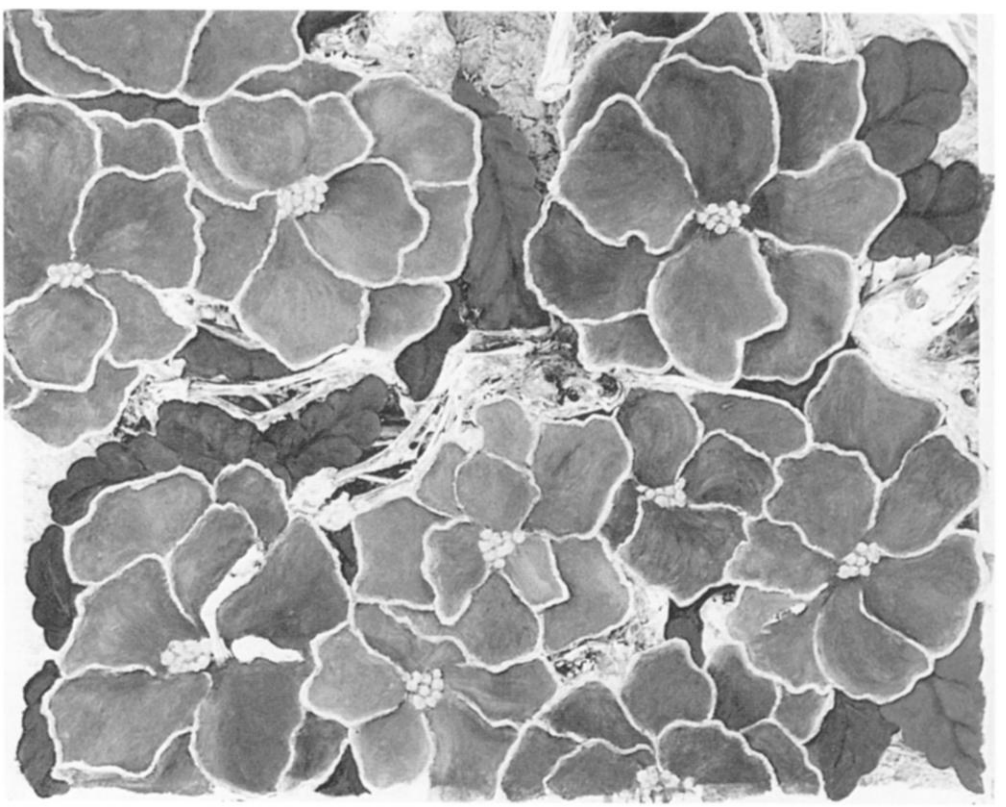
Besides his radical use of time and the priority of visual images over linear narrative or Hollywood editing, Masayesva is also known for the radical representational practices of his video, including his use of computer imagery. His colorfully playful video *Ritual Clowns* (1988) was one of his first videos intended for an international audience. It concerns the role of the Native-American clown, a trickster who does not

merely entertain but who also admonishes, instructs, and disciplines. Anthropological voice-overs attacking Native clowns as immoral and offensive are contrasted with Charlie Chaplin sequences which imply that Euro-American clowns are merely passive entertainment. Computer graphics allow Masayesva to show bouncing clowns crashing down and running nimbly on earth; in one striking sequence, he juxtaposes footage of police repression and rockets taking off in a flat-colored katcina-like image that includes U.S. and Soviet Union flag motifs. Masayesva explained to me that he uses computer imagery because of its immediacy:

> I need to say this, and images are going to say it and not the words, so I have the economy of time to deal with. So I use computer imagery to take the short cuts. *That's* why I use them, not because it's a gimmick: it's part of the economy of presenting the information.

Video as a form of ritual clowning is evident in two works which use computer graphic imagery to explore the subject of Hopi pottery. In the video *Pott Starr* (1990), after a stereotypical travelogue image of a Native woman filling a pot with water, whirling pots take on the dimension of spinning planets, one which is underlined further in Masayesva's fascinating video *Siskyavi: The Place of Chasms* (1991). Seemingly neutral demonstrations by eager white Smithsonian scientists of pottery conservation and restoration techinques for the benefit of silently watching Hopi teenagers are exposed as being part of an appropriation process which is insidiously destructive. Science is not objective and dispassionate but actually a dominating cultural standard of white society. For what is being dissected and magnified on the video screen of the scientists who use electron microscopy, x-ray, and ultraviolet light are objects taken from the sacred Hopi place of Siskyavi.

In contrast to the Smithsonian experts who describe Hopi pottery in the past tense, as objects produced by a dying culture which must be preserved, a Hopi woman teaches pottery-making to her granddaughter: she confesses her sorrow and bitterness over the scientific raiding of sacred places, and her view of pottery is as something living, deeply in the present, part of a life cycle which includes naming one's children and honoring one's ancestors.

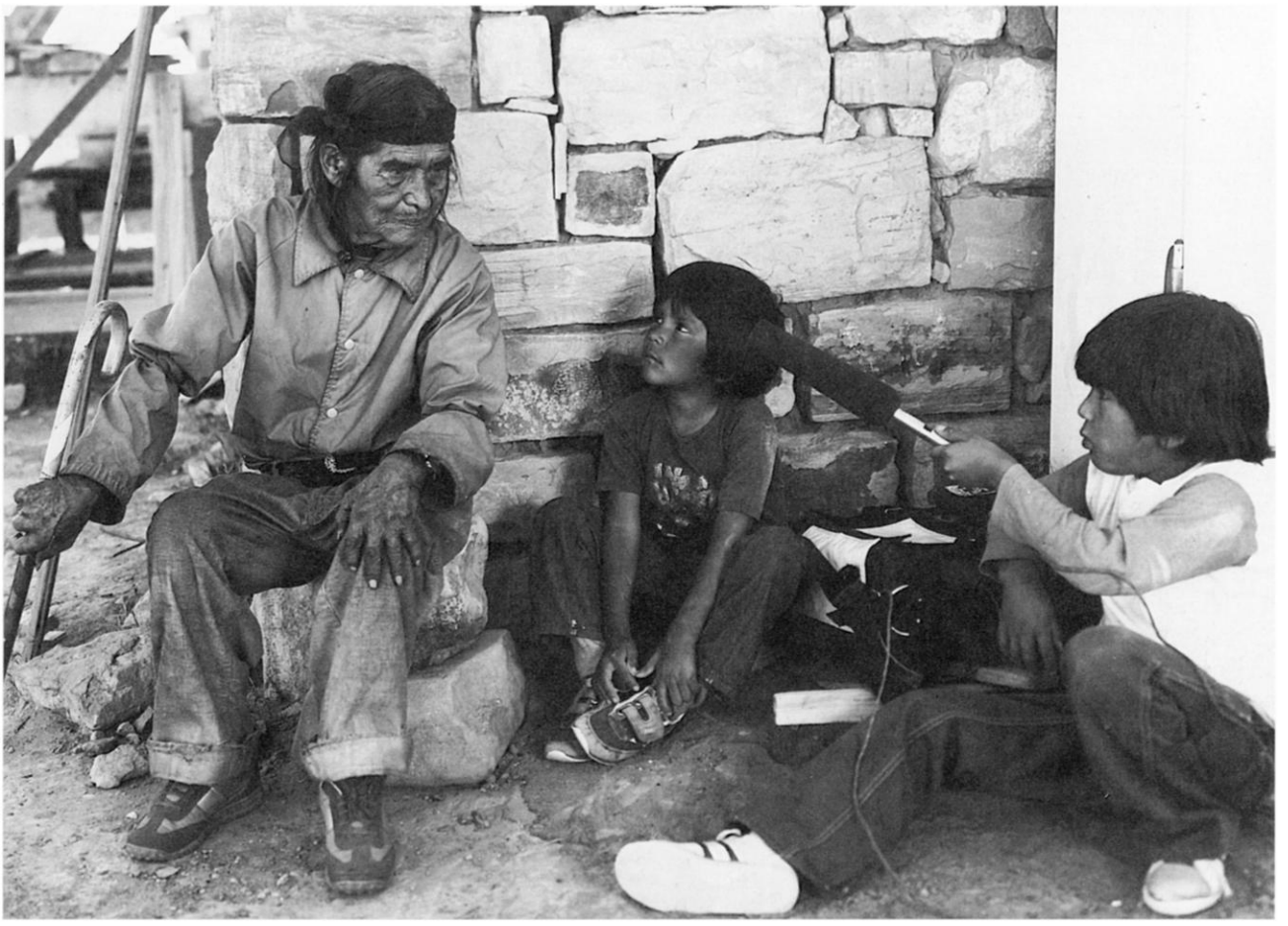


"Southwest Bouquet"

Victor Masayesva, Jr. (right), on the set of *Imagining Indians*

Cinema and *Imagining Indians*

How information is presented, who does the presenting, and how refraining from photographing becomes a sacred act are the central issues explored in Masayesva's latest endeavor, his film *Imagining Indians* (1992). Native-American resistance to the white man's media exploitation of Native cultures has occurred since the beginning of cinema: in 1904, for example, photographer Edward Sheriff Curtis made a film of a Navajo Nightway (Yeibichi) ceremony, but the participants intentionally performed it backwards.[14] Many Native Americans of the Southwest, outraged by the intrusiveness of photographers, would purposefully jump in front of the camera, throw sand or rocks, and even break cameras to prevent filming, later banning the photographing and filming of certain ceremonies.[15] In the spirit of resistance of those who performed their dances backwards as well as those who threw sand or rocks at the camera, *Imagining Indians* addresses the absurdity and indignity of dominant culture's appetite for images of Native Americans. It is a film about language, power, and representation. As Masayesva explains, he intentionally used film rather than video in order to enter into discussion with Hollywood films like *Dances with Wolves*. From the opening pan of a canyon landscape in which we hear stereotypical Hollywood-Western music only to hear a voice-over shout "Cut!" as the figure of a lone Native-American woman walks across the supposedly barren landscape, we are made aware of the intersection between Hollywood's vision of the



Itam Hakim, Hopiit: Narrator Ross Macaya

West as an empty wilderness, and the lived lives of Native peoples inhabiting the land. To the majority of the non-Native population in the U.S., Indians do not exist without feather bonnets. Contemporary problems of the poverty of life on reservations, FBI raids, mineral mining, etc., do not find a place in the popular imagination. As Masayesva explains, his film condemns the *recycling* of these same old images of the Native American (whose history would appear to end in the 1890s).

Masayesva reports that several white critics have seen his latest film as "amateurish." Perhaps they dislike its fierce satire, or its refusal to offer the viewer noble Indians undertaking vision quests to a tinkling New Age sound track. Like the popular postcard image of the Kayapó Indian wielding video cameras, Masayesva, as a Native American with a camera, is certainly in danger of representing a kind of "entertainment of violated boundaries," as Donna Haraway put it.[16] As Masayesva puts it:

> . . . [critics] don't give me credit for the *simplicity* of the presentation. I think they have this attitude, "What are these Native Savages doing with the camera?". . . We've always been in front of the camera, and it's kind of rare to see us back there. And in some places they even *wait* for the white people to come around when we're all there already ready to shoot.

In the past, photographs and films produced by Native Americans were seen by anthropologists as windows onto the Primitive mind. The most famous instance of this occurred in the late 1960s, when anthropologists Sol Worth and John Adair taught a few Navajo to make film in the belief that such films would be, as Margaret Mead termed it, the "direct expression of animist sensibility."[17] What interests me most about "The Navajo Film Themselves Series," is

not whether such films can be read as revealing indigenous codes of thought, but how they may be read as cultural documents about the problems of representation in film. Like many other Native-American children of the time, Maxine and Maryjane Tsosie, who made one film of the series, *The Spirit of the Navajo*, had been sent to boarding schools in a measure promoted by whites so that Native Americans might forget their own language and assimilate into white society. The awkwardness of the Tsosie sisters around their grandfather Sam Yazzie reveals the gaps caused by cultural disruption, an awkwardness which anticipates Navajo film-maker Arlene Bowman's film *Navajo Talking Picture* (1986). The Tsosies's careful respect for their grandfather—their seeming ignorance of the film grammar of facial close-ups—so irritated Sol Worth that at one point he grabbed the camera from them.[18] Another film of the series, Al Clah's *Intrepid Shadows,* was seen by Mead as revealing Navajo cosmology, but I would like to suggest that it may also be read as a film by an art-school-trained film-maker about the process of film-making: the spinning spool in the film is like a film projector wheel, the long shadow suggestive of the film-maker himself, and the Yeibichi mask forces us to see from the eyes of the camera. Masayesva is well aware of the danger of becoming entertainment for white audiences: *Imagining Indians* deconstructs the Euro-American desire to always read Native cultural products as reflective of an "animist sensibility."

The audience of *Imagining Indians* is made aware of competing discourses of power, and the humor, like that of *Siskyavi*, is both subtle and overt, visual and linguistic, sharp-edged and ambiguous. A young Lakota man, for example, vigorously relates his ill-treatment as an extra in *Dances with Wolves*, but he wears a Redskin baseball cap, reappropriating the sports world's notorious use of the Native American as a team symbol. A feathered dancer filmed in slow motion and black and white—a pristine image of a picturesque Indian dancer—turns out to wear a numbered placard: the dancer is competing in an indoor powwow competition. In another sequence, there is a slow pan of a parking lot of a restaurant lounge and a "trading center" with a sudden close-up of a large sculptured Indian, his arm raised in a Hollywood "How!" salute. The banality of that yawning space reflects the banality of the pan of the Western landscape in a Western. Several jokes are culturally specific: an anesthesized dental patient (Patty Runs After Swallow) is forced to listen not only to the inanities of the patronizing dentist but also to a National Public Radio-type broadcast about "Native America": the scene parodies the government health services found on many reservations.

Through a combination of interviews of Native-American actors who talk about their experiences as extras in Hollywood films with parodic sequences and computer imagery, Masayesva sets out to destroy the silence that surrounds the filmed Native. As one interviewee explains, "The Indian side . . . what would it feel like to have a white man come into your village" is missing from Hollywood movies. Instead, she laments, Native Americans are competing with each other to be props, providing the stage, providing the color. Masayesva's film is not univocal: he provides the viewer with a range of opinions on issues concerning the representation of Indians and reveals how commercial cinema divides Native communities. He includes an interview with Clement "Sunny" Richards, a community leader who not only aided and benefited from the filming of *Thunderheart* but led a prayer prior to the shooting of every scene, whether the scene was sacred or not. Richards is an apologist for Hollywood film-makers: he claims that *Thunderheart* did not exploit sacred ceremonies such as the Ghost Dance or sweat-lodge ceremonies, since they are only filming what was already filmed in earlier Hollywood films.

Diametrically opposed to Richards is a young man who had worked as a carpenter on the set of *Dances with Wolves*. He agonizes over the discord in the community that box-office sweat-lodge realism and New Age rapaciousness has wreaked. His voice cracks as he describes how he felt during the filming of *Dances with Wolves*:

> No matter how they do it it still isn't right. Because doing a Ghost Dance in a movie. . . . That was a pretty spiritual thing back in Wounded Knee, and those people gave their lives up. . . . I felt so low, I felt so bad watching them practice doing the Ghost Dance. . . . It's not even right. Even if they have the right song, the right dance, the right tree, the right everything . . . still doesn't make it right, still doesn't make it right.

This selling of the sacred and the contested notion of what constitutes "the public domain," as well as the necessity to destroy the historical silences surrounding representations of Native Americans, is part of what Masayesva and other Native artists are pursuing

"Canyonland—Doorways"

in their work in visual media. The problem of how Native peoples are represented extends beyond a rhetoric of "negative images": it is at the heart of how information is received and retained. Masayesva's film thus also features interviews with white collectors, purveyors of one influential source of information. At stake is a certain view of history which sees Native-American cultural objects as part of the public domain. As one art dealer interviewed in *Imagining Indians* put it: "Once these items pass through the lens of history, they don't really belong to anybody specifically anymore. . . . " As this interviewee's revealing metaphor attests, the conception of history as a camera-like apparatus which endeavors to record and document "vanishing ways of life" silences Native-American claims for the repatriation of revered objects such as certain ceremonial items or even one's father's bones. James Clifford explains that collecting in the West ". . . has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity." Certainly the collecting of Native-American objects, whether by tourists, art dealers, museums, or scientists, situates these collected "cultures" in the "ethnographic present": explained in the present tense but conceived as remnants of the human past. Clifford elucidates:

> Both collector and salvage ethnographer would claim to be the last to rescue "the real thing." Authenticity . . . is produced by removing objects and customs from their current historical situation—a present-becoming-future.[19]

Masayesva explains that the Snake Dance was discarded by the Hopis because they felt it no longer fit into the future as it had been set for the Hopi at the turn of the century: a vital culture can pick and choose what to save.

Masayesva's camera captures the greedy lunacy of tanned, turquoise-bejeweled suburban tourists buying at a Santa Fe art show. One male professsor of Native-American studies and his wife explain that their purchasing of items makes the Indians happy. The woman complains that even though she and her husband have no room in their house anymore for their collection, they are still compelled to buy. She boasts, "If the Indians have made it, we have at least one of them." Although Dennis O'Rourke in his film *Cannibal Tours* (1987) also interviewed white wealthy tourists to New Guinea in order to expose the capitalist greediness of tourism, he never gives a sense of the point of view of the New Guinea people as members of a community, and he does not apply his own critique of white tourists to himself as film-maker. Masayesva's film differs in an important way: he sympathetically listens to the Native Americans frustrated by white appropriation of Native symbols and culture, but he also implicates himself in the process. In discussing his film with me, he notes the importance of self-reflexivity, such as the attack of the dental patient at the end of the film against the camera:

> It really was a composite process to let people know there were a lot of cracks in the seams. It was *about* imagining Indians, and *I* was part of that imagining. And I wasn't trying to absolve myself . . . I was implicating myself by having, by showing the technology, the filmmaking, the transparency *behind* the scenes.

As the camera lens is destroyed in *Imagining Indians*, one hears voice-overs in several different Native-American languages. Knowing one's *language* and having a connection with one's community are essential requirements for the Native-American filmmaker, according to Masayesva. One woman speaks poignantly about how the filming of sacred rituals—especially filming done inside a sweat lodge—is ultimately hurtful to oneself, one's ancestors, and one's children:

> When did the sacredness lose its sacredness? . . . The white man has managed to record everything about that ceremony; but there's sacred communication, you have to . . . talk your language to be able to say the sacred things. . . .
>
> It's necessary that we keep our language. You know some of us maintain that sacred-

Siskyavi: The Place of Chasms

ness is our responsibility. We have to keep it sacred. And this is why I go back with the film-makers. . . . That's why I talk about accountability. We know what is sacred to us now, and what we know of it.

Masayesva fervently believes that " . . . right now the simple safeguard of . . . knowledge and sacred information is in language"; in other words, whole knowledges are lost when languages fall into disuse. In 1990, he and other Native film-makers formed the Native American Producers Alliance (N.A.P.A.) in order to fight collectively against the exclusion of skilled Native-American film-makers from dominant media.[20] Masayesva would like to make language and ties to the reservation requirements for becoming a member of the N.A.P.A. Theoretically this would mean barring many urban Indians and potentially also those of mixed ancestry. Such exclusions on the basis of notions of cultural authenticity are to my mind extremely problematic: they appear to be based on the same logic of dominant popular culture that sees Indians as "real" only if they are "full-blooded," excluding many who were part of the Native-American diaspora to major metropolitan centers of the U.S. At the same time, Masayesva is engaged in coalition-building among other indigenous groups, as was evident in his collaboration on the film festival "Imagining Indians: A Native American Film and Video Festival" (Scottsdale, AZ, June 2–5, 1994), which featured the works of Maori, Inuit, and other native peoples.

The predicament of the Native-American media producer is indeed complex, requiring the negotiation of several cultures, media, and languages. It is explained best by Masayesva in an anecdote. One day an old Hopi man whom Masayesva was photographing called him a *Kwikwilyaqa*:

> He was comparing me with a katcina, a spiritual being, one of that category of katcinas who involve themselves with buffonery, burlesque, and social commentary. . . .
>
> At the time, what made me laugh was the knowledge of what I must look like to him, under my focusing cloth, bent over my view camera. The cloth must have looked like the blanket of juniper bark which *Kwikwilyaqa* wears over his head. Later came the sober realization that he might have meant *Kwikwilyaqa* in the perspective of what this being does: he duplicates.When he comes into the plaza, this *Kwikwilyaqa* shadows anyone he can find, attaching himself to that person. He mimics every action and motion of the harried person he selects. In this way the *Kwikwilyaqa* rapidly becomes a nuisance.[21]

Masayesva explains that he understood then how buffoonlike his role was. He ends his essay with this observation:

> This aggravating, obnoxious, funny, and profoundly claustrophobic Katcina creates and contains both the photographer and the tourist. Consolation lies in his raison d'être: the *Kwikwilyaqa* is living commentary on what photographers are and what photography is; implicating us in turn, revealing what people do to people.[22]

Who is photographing and what is photographed are no longer innocuous questions. Whether throwing stones at the camera, refraining to represent certain subjects, or taking up the camera, the visual poetry of Masayesva's work—his ritual clowning—reveals to us the extraordinarily multivalent problems of representation that must be addressed in contemporary photography, video, and film as practiced at the end of the second millennium. As the storyteller Ross Macaya prophecies at the end of *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*:

> These stories are going to be put down so the children will remember them. The children will be seeing this and improving on it. This is what will happen. This will not end anywhere.

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Notes

1. Victor Masayesva, Jr., "Kwikwilyaqa: Hopi Photography," in *Hopi Photographers/Hopi Images*, ed. Victor Masayesva, Jr., and Erin Younger, vol. 8, *Sun Tracks: An American Indian Literary Series* (Tucson, AZ: Sun Tracks & University of Arizona Press, 1984), p. 10.

2. Minik Wallace, quoted in Kenn Harper, *Give Me My Father's Body: The Life of Minik the New York Eskimo* (Frobisher Bay, NWT: Blacklead Books, 1986), p. 132.
3. George Burdeau, "Retelling Contact: Dramatizing Ishi" (paper presented at the conference "Representing Native Americans" held at New York University, 1992).
4. Interview with Victor Masayesva, Jr., conducted by Fatimah Tobing Rony on 19 April, 1993.
5. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963), pp. 233, 240.
6. James Baldwin and Margaret Mead, *A Rap on Race* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1971), p. 181.
7. Ibid., p. 189.
8. Masayesva, p. 10.
9. George W. Stocking, Jr., "The Ethnographic Sensibility of the 1920s and the Dualism of the Anthropological Tradition," in *Romantic Motives: Essays on Anthropological Sensibility*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr,. vol. 6, *History of Anthropology* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 208–76.
10. Elizabeth Weatherford, "Native American Media Makers at Work," *The Independent* 4 (1983), p. 18.
11. Masayesva explains, " . . . the title *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* translates directly as We, Someone the Hopi, from the idea that we journeyed over the entire continent, out of which experiences we became the Hopi. So the title goes: We someone who became the Hopi. That is why the story is told in landscapes, stops and major landmarks, what they saw, what they heard." (Letter to the author, September 3, 1993.)
12. This use of archival photographs brings up the question of the ways in which archival images may be used to illustrate articles and essays which appear to critique visual exploitation but in re-reproducing the images may reify this form of visual cannibalism. One example which is quite popular among academics writing on postcolonial studies is Sander L. Gilman's article, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 223–61. This article is frequently cited by critics wishing to discuss the representation of Woman in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I agree with Gilman's analysis that there is a connection between the representation of women of color and white prostitutes, for racism and sexism indeed, as Etienne Balibar explains, function together. However, I disagree with the manner in which Gilman links the exploitation of Sarah Bartman and the representation of the *courtisane* Nana in Edouard Manet's painting *Nana* (1877) for the following reasons. First, Gilman's own obsession to reproduce images of Sarah Bartman and her genitals represents yet another exploitation of Bartman, and reveals that the critique of visualism may itself be visualist in an imperialist and patriarchal way. Secondly, Gilman jumps to the conclusion that the French focus on the buttocks of white women's bodies in the nineteenth century is tied to the perceived *pathology* of the large rounded buttocks of some African women. African women are thus pathologized by Gilman, and he forecloses the possibility that this physical characteristic may not be linked to aberrance but to the borrowing of an aesthetic of *beauty* from other cultures, such as Brazil, for example. For a work which addresses the problem of silencing of the African woman's voice by science, see Elizabeth Alexander, *The Venus Hottentot The Callaloo Poetry Series*, ed. Charles H. Rowell (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1990).
13. See, for example, Dean Curtis Bear Claw's *Warrior Chiefs in a New Age* (1990), Gary Rhine and Fidel Moreno's *Wiping the Tears of Seven Generations* (1990), and Diane Reyna and Edward Ladd's *Surviving Columbus* (1992), which all include film footage and photography by Euro-Americans such as Curtis and Joseph Dixon, but with the express aim of providing alternate readings.
14. Mick Gidley, "From the Hopi Snake Dance to 'The Ten Commandments': Edward S. Curtis as Filmmaker." *Studies in Visual Communication* 8, no. 3 (Summer 1982), pp. 71–73.

    Lyon writes that the footage which is reproduced in T.C. McLuhan's film on Curtis, *The Shadow Catcher* (1975), is reproduced incorrectly as a mirror image (Luke Lyon, "History of the Prohibition of Photography of Southwestern Indian Ceremonies," unpublished paper). Christopher Lyman argues however that the Navajo performing the ceremony did it intentionally backwards. See Christopher M. Lyman, *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions: Photographs of Indians by Edward S. Curtis* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982).
15. In the teens, many Southwest Indian nations began to ban the photography and filming of certain ceremonies supported by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which felt that the filming of non-Christian ceremonies encouraged "Indian savagery."According to Luke Lyon, in 1921 Charles Burke, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, banned certain Indian dances, feeling that it encouraged "savagery." The Indians themselves chose to ban the photography of many of their dances, citing exploitation; they also feared that the pictures might be used as evidence against them in the 1920s.
16. Haraway writes that the Kayapó with the camera is no longer "an entertaining contradiction" if one no longer conceives of the world as a polarized realm between nature and society. She continues, "Where there is no nature or society, there is no pleasure, no entertainment to be had in representing the violation of the boundary between them." (Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler [New York: Routledge, 1992], p. 314.)
17. Sol Worth and John Adair, *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1972).
18. Ibid., pp. 157–60.
19. James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 218, 228.
20. Michelle Yasmine Valladares, "Native American Producers Form Alliance," *The Independent* 16, no. 4 (May 1993), pp. 5–7.
21. Masayesva, pp. 11–12.
22. Ibid., p. 12.

Russell Merritt

Recharging *Alexander Nevsky*

Tracking the Eisenstein-Prokofiev War Horse

In 1987, almost exactly a half-century after its original release, Alexander Nevsky *was revived with live orchestra and chorus. Silent films accompanied with live orchestral accompaniment are now a regular feature of the European film scene, but in the United States the prospect of a sound film with live music seemed bizarre, guaranteed to raise new questions about the ongoing vogue for restoration. The idea was the brainchild of John Goberman, who, working with Gosfilmofond and Broadway arranger William Brohn, arranged for a special new print of Eisenstein's film stripped of the music track and screened in sync with a symphonic orchestra and 100-voice chorus. The production debuted in Los Angeles on 3 November, 1987, at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, with André Previn conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. Since then, this new* Nevsky *has been performed across the country, and has been heard in England and Italy. In March, 1993, it was performed in San Francisco with the San Francisco Symphony conducted by David Zinman, and Russell Merritt was asked to talk about the production before each performance. What follows is based on those remarks.*

By spring 1937, just three months before agreeing to film *Nevsky*, Sergei M. Eisenstein had been "carefully packed up and consigned to oblivion," in the words of a co-worker. He feared arrest by the NKVD, and was paralyzed by reports that students and former associates had disappeared. Since his return to the Soviet Union six years earlier, he had been forced to confront a Russia transformed by the spreading absolutism of Stalin's dictatorship. In the wake of the *Bezhin Meadow* fiasco—a project taken away from him in 1937 because of what was called his "mysticism and ideological confusion"—Eisenstein was not only in absolute professional disgrace, he was in actual danger.

Less often noticed is that during this same period Eisenstein's famous collaborator also suffered, if not

ALEXANDER
NEVSKY

disgrace, at least critical eclipse. At the point he agreed to write *Nevsky*'s music, Sergei Prokofiev had been back in Russia for two years, having finally decided in 1936 to end an 18-year self-imposed exile. As with Eisenstein, the years since Prokofiev's return marked the low point of his career, characterized by denunciations against him, canceled productions, and hostile government investigation. Except for *Peter and the Wolf*, no new Prokofiev composition had been performed or had found a publisher in three years. Thus for Prokofiev as for Eisenstein, *Nevsky* became a critical test, a vehicle that provided both men the chance to rehabilitate themselves. They accepted the project knowing that Stalin was taking a personal interest in it—indeed, evidence exists that Stalin directly intervened to enable Eisenstein to direct *Nevsky*—and Eisenstein in particular was under the constant supervision of Soviet bureaucrats to make certain his film was politically reliable.[1]

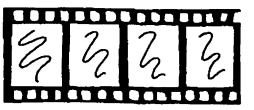
One result is that *Alexander Nevsky* is Eisenstein's least complicated film, a straightforward battle cry meant to stir Russian sentiment against the Germans. As a war propaganda film, there is nothing terribly subtle about *Nevsky*.[2] But in other ways modern viewers find it hard to follow. Part of the problem is simply informational. Eisenstein expects his audiences to be familiar with characters and historical events that mean little to most Western audiences. He makes deliberately elliptical references to a broad range of arcane medieval lore in order to recreate a style—an epic style—that deliberately alludes to bits and pieces of Russian tales as though they were common knowledge.

If, for instance, Nevsky is the hero prince of Novgorod, as we are told in one of Prokofiev's songs, what is he doing living in a fishermen's lodge? We are expected to know, without being told, that he is in exile at the start of the film. And we are also expected to know the reason. Why is Novgorod divided over recalling Nevsky to defend the city? And what are Crusaders, invariably depicted in Western popular art marching on the Holy Land, doing so far off course? Here, too, Eisenstein assumes knowledgeable viewers.

Another reason for difficulty stems from Eisenstein's tactic in constructing his drama. He is not adapting any single narrative in *Nevsky*, but mixes together different story formulae from different eras, much in the way Wagner fuses and alters elements from Teutonic and Old Norse mythology for his Ring cycle. The film is a mishmash of motifs manipulated and compressed into a succinct dramatic synthesis. Eisenstein starts with a late thirteenth-century sacred chronicle of Nevsky, glues onto it materials from non-Russian medieval epics, then patches onto that a love story that he found in Victorian chivalric romances. Finally, he sets the whole thing within the framework of 1930s Soviet nationalism. Inconsistencies, contradictions, and confusions are a conspicuous feature of the process. So, for instance, national identity, which would have meant nothing to the historic Nevsky or to the Crusaders, becomes a mainspring of Eisenstein's synthetic text.

Principles of epic compression and ellipsis also permit Eisenstein virtually to reinvent Nevsky for his own purposes, enabling him to suppress unpalatable facts about his hero while alluding to them obliquely through dramatic symbols and background imagery. For instance, we would never imagine from the dialogue that Nevsky was a Christian prince later canonized as a Russian saint, and that thirteenth-century Russia was a Christian country. In Stalin's reinvention of Nevsky as a prototypical Bolshevik peasant leader, Christianity has been anathematized. Russian Christianity is, however, constantly alluded to in the background—in the Byzantine stone carvings, in the crosses on top of the Novgorod onion domes, in the designs on Nevsky's military medallions, and most subtly, in Prokofiev's score. We might listen, for instance, to the trick Prokofiev plays with the organ. Throughout the film, the organ is specifically identified as a liturgical instrument, played by a demented monk who accompanies the Crusaders. But having given it this religious identification, Prokofiev tears the organ away from the monk—literally, when Nevsky's troops overrun the Grand Commander's camp and capture his entourage—and then, when we least expect it, reintroduces it, with all its churchly identification and associations, to accompany the Russian chorus singing the Alexander Nevsky theme at the grand finale.

The deliberately elliptical style of epic narrative makes effects like this possible. Prokofiev's music underscores the ellipses in Eisenstein's narrative by opening up fissures between the sound track and the images, commenting on and occasionally even contradicting what is seen on the screen. The opening sequence provides a particularly elegant illustration of this interplay.



The film starts with images of a field strewn with the litter of battle—skeletons, skulls, a raven, a rotting arrow, and a helmet—glistening in beautifully framed compositions, glossy and immaculate.[3] Overgrown weeds and bleached bones function narratively to indicate a battle fought some time ago. In a series of five shots, Eisenstein partitions the battlefield and then moves to the right, revealing a large lake nearby, identifying it in an intertitle as Lake Pleshchayev. The plain we have just seen is where the Russians lost to the Mongols, the Asian invaders who now rule the region.

Prokofiev's music sounds appropriately somber. It is a simple lament in C minor, heard first on the oboe, then repeated on the bassoon, and reprised on the English horn. He would later reorchestrate this for his *Nevsky* Cantata as part of "Russia under the Mongolian Yoke." (Fig.1)

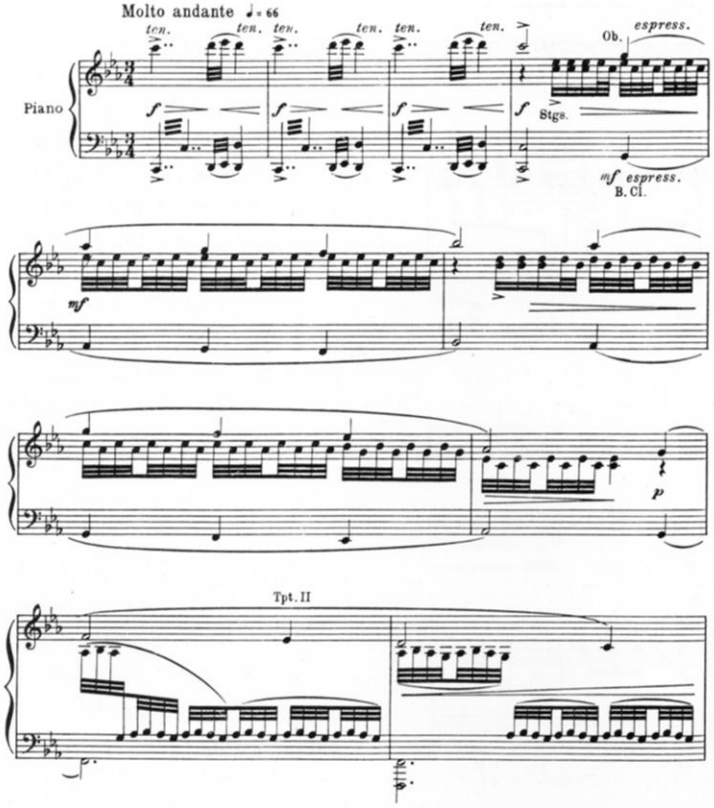
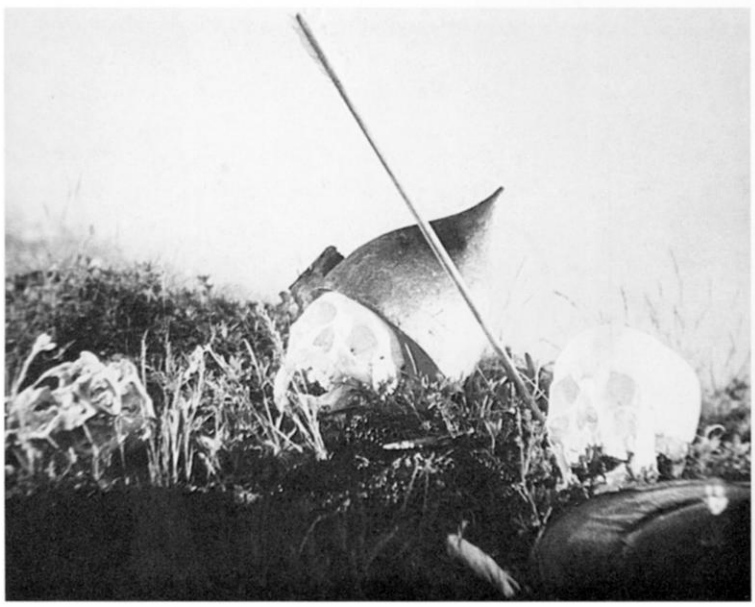


Fig. 1, *Nevsky*'s opening lament: the Russian defeat at Lake Pleshchayev



The music segues as, from another part of the lake, we see Russian peasants carry logs, haul fishing lines, and chop wood. Off to the left the hulls of two ships are in the midst of construction. The narrative logic seems to be: Having suffered defeat, the peasants now rebuild their ships and homes. But if we are attentive, we become aware of a stylistic sleight of hand. Prokofiev's music brightens from the plaintive Mongol Yoke theme, written in the minor, to a broad flowing epic line in the major, sung by the male chorus. (Fig. 2)[4] This is Alexander Nevsky's theme, and what the chorus sings about is not defeat but a vic-

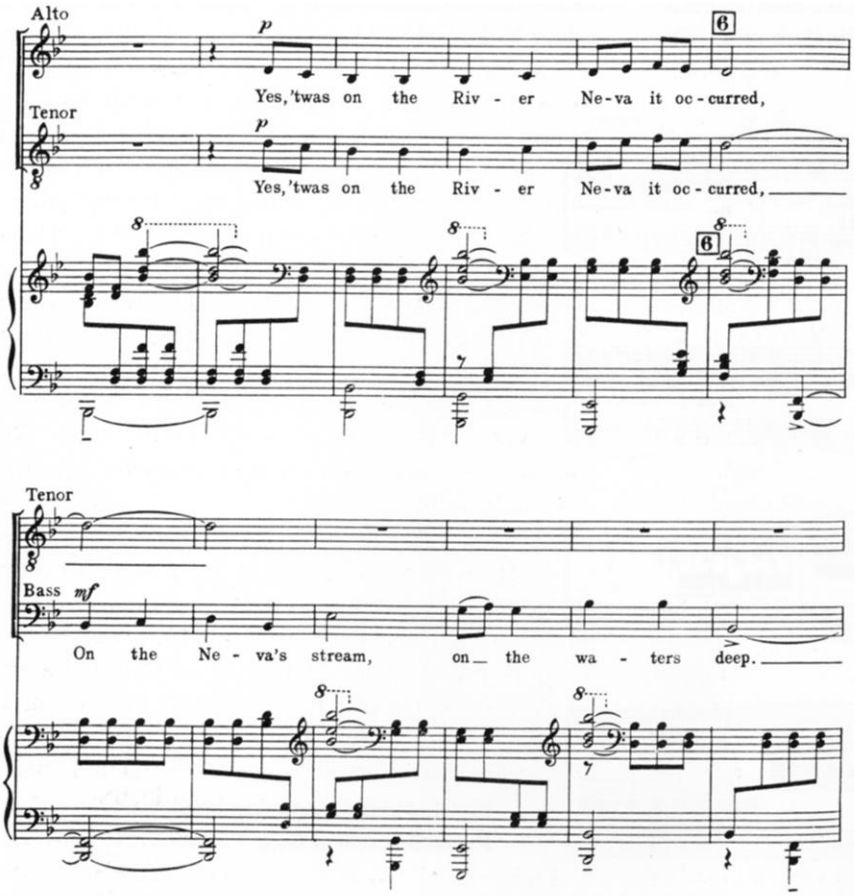
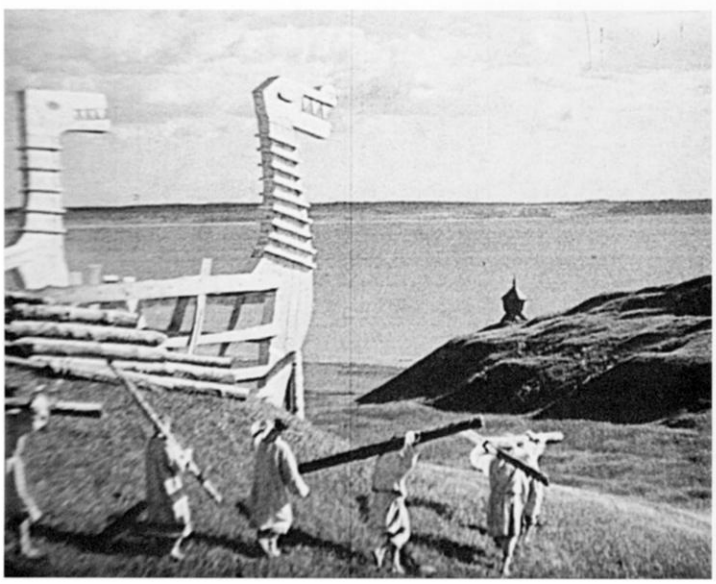


Fig. 2, From lament to work song . . .



tory—Nevsky's previous victory over the Swedes on the River Neva. Eisenstein is matching the words of Prokofiev's chorus in such a way that we identify the lake we see (Lake Pleshchayev), the site of a military disaster, with Lake Neva, the site of a great military victory. The editing also connects the domestic work the defeated peasants perform—chopping wood, hauling in fishing nets—with that of a military triumph. Though Prokofiev arranges the music in the style of a work song, it sounds less like the song of downtrodden men than of a victorious army.

The note of martial victory becomes even more emphatic in the following section of Nevsky's theme. (Fig. 3) As one man hacks away at a log, we hear, "We smashed their ships of war to kindling wood"; as we watch fishermen gathering in their nets, we hear, "We mowed down the Swedes, the invading troops, just like feather grass, grown on desert soil."(Fig. 4)

We could be forgiven, in fact, if we thought we were watching peasants recollecting in tranquillity a glorious triumph that took place in the fields and waters around them. Their gleaming white clothes, unmarked by the mud or grime of the workplace, their beautiful serene faces, and the glossy, shimmering pastoral setting seem to reinforce the continuity with a great heroic past. The images have established that Nevsky lives in exile on Lake Pleshchayev overlooking a shameful Russian defeat. But thanks to Eisenstein's editing strategies and Prokofiev's chorus, the lake has also become Nevsky's lake, Lake Neva, after which Nevsky the military hero was named.

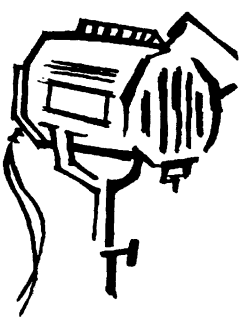
When the chorus music ends, hard reality returns.

We now see a band of Mongol horsemen leading a covered cart. And if we look closely, we also see behind the carts a line of Russian captives. (Fig. 5) The sequence that follows—where Mongols demand that the Russians fall to their knees and propose to Nevsky that he join them—is another heavily encoded sequence. It indirectly alludes to the historical fact that after Nevsky defeated the Germans in the Battle of the Ice, he dealt with the Mongols by submitting to them, literally kowtowing, prostrating himself before the Khan, and then actively collaborating with the Mongols to collect taxes and fight off their enemies—including his brother.[5] (Fig. 6)

In the original scenario, Eisenstein planned to deal with this. The film was supposed to end with the death of Nevsky, who acknowledges the tragic necessity of consorting with the Mongolian oppressors but foresees that his collaboration will make possible Russia's liberation from them 200 years later. Nevsky's visionary patriotism notwithstanding, Eisenstein's minders made him delete it all. As Eisenstein wrote later, "A hand other than mine drew a red pencil mark after the scene about the defeat of the Germans, and wrote in, 'The scenario finishes here. Such a fine prince cannot die!'"[6]

Our sequence works through principles of irony and denial. Nevsky has become the urbane fisherman prince whose wit deflects a potential bloodbath and whose banter with the envoy underscores deep loyalty to the Russian soil. Irony escalates to cognitive dissonance, however, when the music returns. The envoy and his entourage leave, Russian captives in tow. And as they leave, the chorus returns with Nevsky's theme. So, while we watch Russians being led away in bondage, we hear the final verses of the song: "We shall never yield native Russian land. They who march on Rus shall be put to death." Once again, sound denies the evidence before our eyes. The chorus accompanies images of enslaved Russians and triumphant Mongols—these Russians *have* yielded native Russian land. It is they, not the invaders, who have been enslaved.

Critics of the film will see, I think, a kind of doublespeak in all this. This is more than the simple compression associated with the literary epic form, an ellipsis that encapsulates a variety of times and places. In this sequence, what we hear is actively contradicted by what we see, with no attempt to resolve the contradictions. This, I think, is what Eisenstein meant when he wrote of Prokofiev, "His music is amazingly plastic . . . never content with remaining an illustration. Sparkling with triumphant imagery, it presents a wonderful picture of the inner movement of the phenomenon and its dynamic structure, which embody the emotion and meaning of the event."[7]



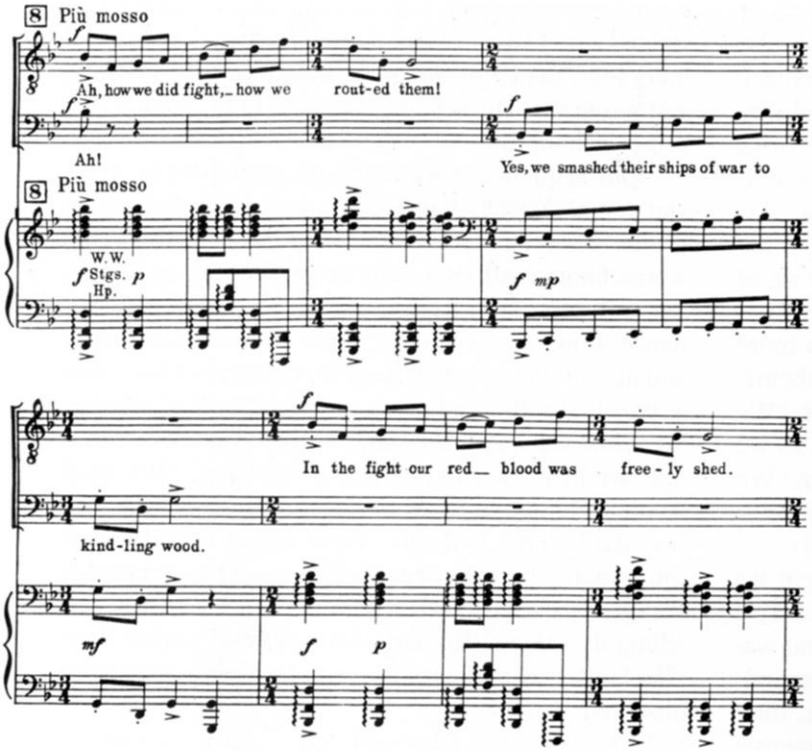


Fig. 3, Recollections of fierce fighting

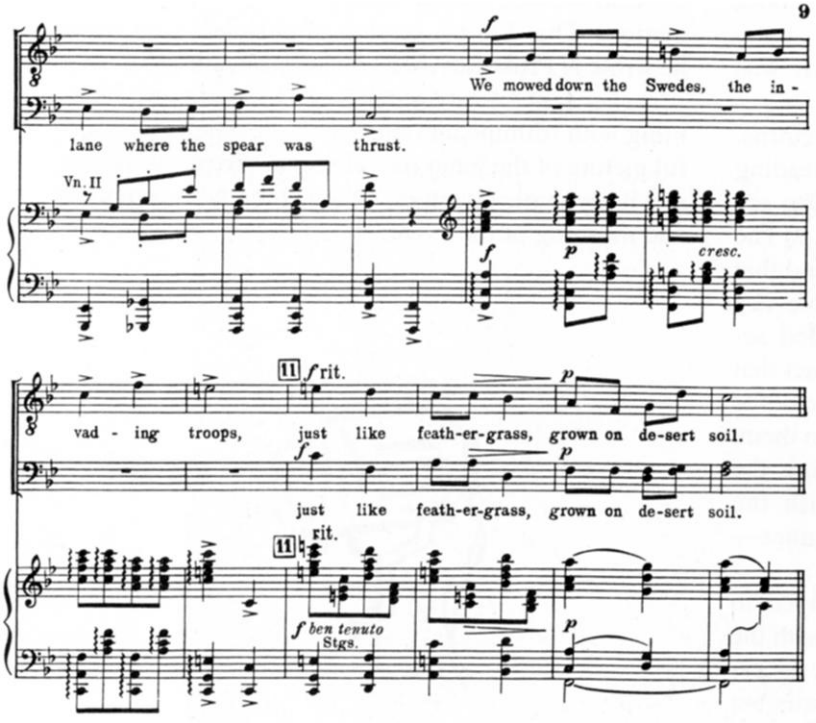


Fig. 4, Recollections of victory

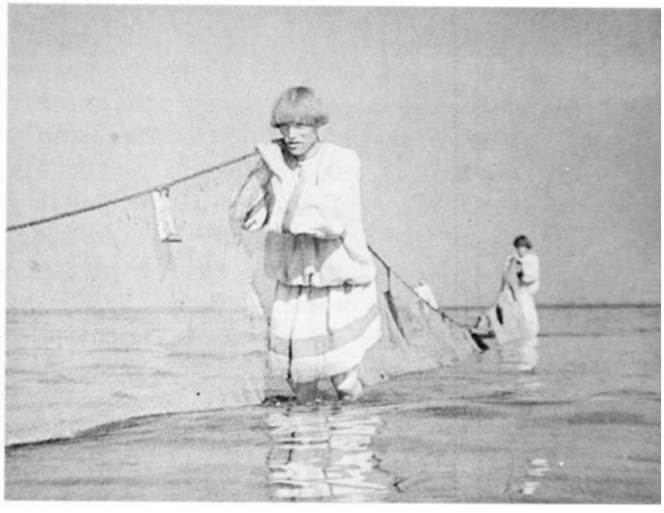


Fig. 5, Mongols taking away Russian slaves

Fig. 6, Recasting history: the Mongols force Nevsky's *son* to kowtow

By all accounts the Eisenstein/Prokofiev collaboration was a remarkably creative and congenial one. The outgoing Eisenstein and the taciturn Prokofiev worked exceptionally well together, filled with admiration for each other's work. Eisenstein later wrote that working with Prokofiev's music and collaborating with Prokofiev to develop new dialectical theories of integrating music into film were the only enriching aspects of *Nevsky* for him. For his part, Prokofiev called Eisenstein "unquestionably our best film director," and he was delighted to discover how much his director already knew about music. Eisenstein, in fact, went on to direct a Russian production of Wagner's *Die Walküre*, and Prokofiev invited Eisenstein to stage his operas *Semyon Kotko* and *War and Peace*.[8]

Eisenstein involved Prokofiev in all aspects of the *Nevsky* production. Prokofiev took notes on the sets, saw the daily rushes, and wrote music as the filming progressed. Some sections of the film were actually scored and recorded before the filming started, so that Eisenstein could match his images to the music. Other parts of the music were written after scenes were shot, but before they were edited—a process regarded as highly unusual for its day.[9]

This brings us to a curious point. It is frequently—and erroneously—said that Prokofiev was the first composer to compose and record parts of his score before the images were filmed. It is true that in Hollywood *live-action* films of the 1930s the music was usually written and recorded in postproduction. But there was a vitally important exception, an exception that fascinated Eisenstein and that Prokofiev studied with particular care.

Like Eisenstein, Prokofiev had visited Hollywood before making *Nevsky*. In fact, when he arrived in the United States in February, 1938, it is likely that he was specifically looking for ideas and technical information that would be useful to the *Nevsky* project. He visited several studios, including Paramount and MGM, but the most intriguing and to my mind the most important visit was the one that has been all but ignored in Prokofiev studies.

In March, 1938, the composer wrote his sons, "Today I have been to the house of Mickey Mouse's Papa." Prokofiev, in fact, was Walt Disney's guest when he visited the Disney studio on Hyperion Avenue for several days in early March. He had been fascinated by the newly-released *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which he had seen in Denver while performing a piano concert and conducting the Denver Symphony Orchestra. *Snow White* was a film he liked so much, in fact, that he insisted the projectionist show it to him again at a special midnight screening.[10] Out in Hollywood, he and Disney got along famously. He played *Peter and the Wolf* for Disney on the piano, saying he had composed it specifically for him. One result of the trip is that Disney contracted to use *Peter and the Wolf* for an animated short.[11]

Disney, in fact, was very much a cultural hero in the Soviet Union, the one American film-maker to be honored at the first Moscow Film Festival in 1935. Eisenstein had visited the Disney studio in 1930, and in his writings expressed great admiration for his work—especially the Silly Symphonies—arguing for Disney's genius in finding fresh correspondence between movements within a shot's graphic design and the movements in melodies, phrases, and motifs. At the end of the 1930s he wrote extensively about Disney's unique conception of Utopian consciousness and about Disney cartoons as a modern form of totemism.[12]

Prokofiev was intrigued by Disney too—particularly the way that Disney's animators synchronized their drawings to their comic scores. Here was a branch of film-making in which the music was invariably recorded before the images were animated, and the Disney studio became famous for its split-second synchronizing of sight to sound. Disney had invented all sorts of techniques, including the so-called click track, in order to match the metronomic tempo of the music to that of the assorted rhythms of the images. Close synchronization—music that explicitly imitates the direction or rhythm of an action—is in fact usually called "Mickey-mousing," so closely has it become identified with Disney.[13]

More generally, at Disney, Prokofiev saw first-hand Hollywood's state-of-the-art recording techniques. At the time of his visit, Disney was in the middle of "The Sorceror's Apprentice." Prokofiev's friend Leopold Stokowski had just recorded the Dukas score, using 14 microphones to transfer the score onto nine tracks in stereophonic sound with all the latest RCA technology. Disney and Stokowski took advantage of it all. Stokowski, the show-biz *maestro* par excellence, conducted various recording experiments with sound mixing, microphone placement, sound filters, variable acoustics, and even electronic instruments to create the most dramatic showcase possible for his music.[14]

Stokowski's experimentations made a great impression on Prokofiev, and in *Nevsky* he adapted them to his own ends. He took an active role in the recording of *Nevsky*'s score, experimenting in particular with

Background Christianity:
the onion domes of Novgorod

microphone placement, sound mixing, and sound filtering. But whereas Stokowski wanted to enhance the illusion of a live performance with his experiments, Prokofiev tried to create deliberate camouflage effects. Just as Prokofiev wrote new melodies to simulate ancient folk tunes and Gregorian chants rather than adapt actual medieval music, so he simulated archaic sounds rather than resurrect actual medieval instruments. Prokofiev despised "quotatious" composers and prided himself that without the help of found objects he could summon up a folk archaic universe of his own creation. Much of this he achieved through highly innovative orchestration and through scoring for reeds and horns in extreme registers. But electronic distortions played a crucial role as well. He deliberately positioned his trumpets and French horns abnormally close to the microphones in order to distort the Teutonic fanfares and then filtered the sound to suggest the reedy timbre of a medieval calling horn. Thanks to similar recording techniques, the organ the Teutonic priest plays is made to sound so nasal that it might be mistaken for a guitar.[15]

There is something specifically Disneyesque, or at least cartoonlike, in the way Prokofiev works for comic effects in his score. In the main, the relationships Prokofiev and Eisenstein create between image and music are contrapuntal, avoiding minute synchronizations. Indeed, as John Goberman has pointed out, practically nothing in *Nevsky* is on the beat. Prokofiev's music doesn't punctuate the action; it comments on it. When Nevsky and the Grand Master do battle on horseback, Eisenstein, unlike any Hollywood editor, is not particularly concerned that the musical sword clashes (played on timpani) synchronize with Nevsky's sword strokes. But Prokofiev breaks this rule when he wants to satirize. So when Nevsky unhorses the Grand Master in hand-to-hand combat, Prokofiev scores a comic whinnying soprano sound for an organ to accompany the horse throwing his rider; and when the last Livonian knights sink beneath the ice, the composer ends an extended percussion attack with a downward trombone glissando, which, Silly Symphony-like, mocks the sinking helmets and gives direction to the gurgling bubbles.

When Prokofiev came to record his music, however, he was at the mercy of a recording system and a group of performers woefully inadequate to the demands he placed on them. If Stokowski had the resources of RCA, the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, and Selznick's Culver City studio at his disposal for *Fantasia*, Prokofiev had to make do with what was arguably the worst sound system available in any major film-producing country in the world. This was another of Stalin's legacies to the arts. As part of his latest Five Year Plan, studios were prevented from buying American or European equipment, and directed to use home-grown inventions. Soviet Shorin sound, the sound system that Prokofiev used, was in frequency range and fidelity approximately where America's sound systems were in the late 1920s, when sound on film was first developed.[16] As for the musicians at Prokofiev's disposal, they were a studio-size ensemble, maybe 20 in all, too small and too poorly prepared to do justice to the score. The result is a track that sounds like a chamber ensemble recorded over a telephone. André Previn called *Nevsky* the greatest film score ever written trapped inside the worst sound track ever recorded. Symptomatically, when American reviewers originally reviewed the film in 1939, no newspaper review even mentioned Prokofiev's music. Not until Prokofiev's cantata was performed—introduced in the United States, incidentally, by Leopold Stokowski—did the American press even connect his name with *Alexander Nevsky*.

Yet poor recording facilities cannot entirely explain the dismal sound quality of the recorded music. Other films made at Mosfilm before *Nevsky*—notably Pudovkin's *Victory* (1938), Alexandrov's musical *Circus* (1936), and Dzigan's *We from Kronstadt* (1936)—make substantial use of music tracks too. True, the frequency ranges are limited, with distortion in the high treble, but the tracks reveal significantly greater fidelity than *Nevsky*. Produced at a fraction of *Nevsky*'s cost, they also make use of markedly better musical performances.

Recently, John Goberman has offered a more provocative theory. He speculated that the music track heard on *Nevsky* may never have been intended for the finished film. *Nevsky*, as has been confirmed by various sources, was taken away from Eisenstein while he was still in the final, frantic stages of postproduction. In early October, when Eisenstein assumed he still had a week or more left before a premiere, Stalin's office peremptorily demanded a private screening. The film and the tracks were still in the final stage of preparation; further, in the rush to put together a print, the director's assistants apparently left behind a reel in the editing room. The film, however, was approved in its unfinished state—perhaps by Stalin himself—and once the film received the imprimatur, no one was willing to change anything.[17]

Eisenstein himself blames only "the eternal rush of the film world" for the disappearance of the crucial scene at the Novgorod bridge; but the story of the surprise Kremlin screening and its aftermath helps explain why Eisenstein sought and was later denied permission to restore the scene. It also helps explain why the Cinema Affairs Committee refused his several requests to shorten and re-edit The Battle on the Ice. In a letter to Semyon Dukelsky, for instance, the man who then headed the Cinema Affairs Committee, Eisenstein begs for three or four more days to continue editing; he also wants to reshoot certain scenes using real ice and snow; and he wants to re-record and remix assorted sound effects and speeches. Elsewhere he asks to shorten The Battle on the Ice by approximately 200 meters. None of the changes was ever approved; none ever made.[18]

Goberman's argument is that the music track, too, fell victim to Stalin's premature viewing of the print: that the current track was meant as a rough cut but, because of the post-Kremlin freeze, went out as part of the completed film. The most compelling evidence can be found on the track itself. Sections of the music for The Battle on the Ice are obviously looped, other parts of the track abruptly cut off. Splices peculiar to the music track (that is, not audible in the accompanying dialogue or sound-effects tracks) create various musical jump cuts, while the overall fidelity of the music is consistently lower than the other tracks.

Yet neither Eisenstein nor Prokofiev, it should be noted, ever indicated in print that they were dissatisfied with the recording or the mix. Indeed, Eisenstein refers with enthusiasm to his "ace sound engineer [Boris] Volsky and operator Bogdankevich," who produced "a sound track with a multi-microphone method never used before in our studio."[19] And if this, as can be argued, was part of a publicity article designed to arouse interest in his film, it must also be noted that in subsequent post-mortems Eisenstein never included the track in his critiques of the film's shortcomings.

Such maddening uncertainties are intrinsic to artifacts created in closed societies, where few published statements can be taken at face value and even private correspondence is usually written with great caution. Could two perfectionists such as Eisenstein and

Filming The Battle on the Ice

Prokofiev actually have been satisfied with the sound of Prokofiev's music, all but buried in a muffled track? As newcomers to sound technology (this was Eisenstein's first sound film, Prokofiev's second), would they have judged the track the best possible under the circumstances? Yet if Eisenstein did not like it, why not say so publicly? Given his proclivity for self-critique (one essay contains a virtual checklist of *Nevsky*'s perceived failures: "its staginess *avant tout*, its length, the rhythmic breaks and failures," and so forth),[20] why hold back on the track?

Such questions became particularly relevant during the recent revival of *Nevsky* in which a specially prepared print was stripped of the music track and replaced by a live symphony orchestra and chorus. The premise was that the recorded track unfairly represents Eisenstein's intent and that by making audible the full richness of Prokofiev's music, the live performance uncovers a truer dynamic balance between music and image. The historical warrant was that neither Eisenstein nor Prokofiev could have actually approved the recorded track and that only political pressures prevented them from expressing themselves publicly.[21]

It is unlikely we will ever know the truth of the matter. But these questions are small compared to the larger ones a production created under such circumstances poses. Frequently, *Alexander Nevsky* is studied as the crude preliminary to the far richer and darker *Ivan the Terrible* films, portrayed as a first run at historical motifs and images that the collaborators would sharpen and fill with terrible irony five years later. But *Nevsky* is a film that, for all its buoyancy and exuberance, contains secrets, mysteries—and dark moral issues—all its own.

■ Russell Merritt is co-author, with J. B. Kaufman, of *Walt in Wonderland*, which won the 1993 Kraszna-Kraus Book Award.

Notes

The author would like to express particular thanks to William Nestrick, Yuri Tsivian, Naum Kleiman, and Anne Nesbet for their advice, expertise, and thoughtful criticism.

1. According to his earliest biographer, Eisenstein himself publicly acknowledged Stalin's personal support. "On the evening when *Alexander Nevsky* was first shown at the Dom Kino in Nov 1938, Eisenstein spoke of his deep gratitude to Comrade Stalin who, at Eisenstein's request, gave him the possibility to achieve a new film, responding sensitively, attentively. . . . " Vsevolod Vishnevsky, *Eisenstein* (Moscow: Goshinozdat, 1939), quoted in Jay Leyda, *Kino* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960), p. 348.

   The precise circumstance under which Eisenstein was suddenly rehabilitated and permitted to direct while many of those around him—including Tretyakov, Meyerhold, Isaac Babel, and Vladimir Nilssen—were arrested, tortured, and shot, will probably never be known. The fullest account is contained in Naum Kleiman, "On the Story of 'Montage 1937,'" in Eisenstein's *Selected Works, Volume 2: Towards a Theory of Montage*, ed. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor (London: BFI Publishing, 1991), pp. xvii–xx. Marie Seton provides a vivid eyewitness account of Eisenstein's fear of arrest and hurried move to the Caucasus following the *Bezhin Luq* fiasco in *Sergei M. Eisenstein* (New York: Grove Press, 1952), pp. 371–72.
2. A revised script signed by Pavlenko and Eisenstein appeared in *Znamya* (December, 1937) as *Rus*. This treatment, publicly and privately critiqued, was newly revised and then officially reviewed—possibly by Stalin himself. It was then published as "*Alexander Nevsky*" in early 1938. This 1938 scenario was the one reprinted in the six-volume collected work of Eisenstein (*Izbrannye pizvedeniya*) in 1964, then translated by Diana Matias, edited by Jay Leyda, and published by Lorrimer in *Eisenstein, Two Films:* October *and* Alexander Nevsky (1984). The final scene of *Rus*, censored out of the 1938 scenario, apears in the Lorrimer appendix (pp. 144–48).

   According to Naum Kleiman, curator of the Eisenstein Cabinet at Moscow, Pavlenko's original scenario was one of two properties at Mosfilm that Film Committee head Boris Shumyatsky offered Eisenstein to direct. The other was Victor Shklovksy's story about the seventeenth-century Russian prince, Dmitri Pozharsky. Pudovkin directed the Shklovsky scenario, *Minin and Pozharsky*, in 1939. (Kleiman to author, 9 May, 1994.)
3. References are taken from a 35mm Gosfilmofond print of *Alexander Nevsky* at the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, California. For permission to view the print and make frame enlargements, grateful thanks to Tom Luddy of Zoetrope Films and to Edith Kramer, director of the Pacific Film Archive.
4. English text translated by A. Steiger for the vocal score to *Alexander Nevsky: Cantata for Chorus and Orchestra.* New York: MCA Music, 1945.
5. Accounts of Nevsky's career can be found in Aleksandr Presniakov, *The Formation of the Great Russian State* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970); in George Vernadsky, *A History of Russia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973); and in the first two chapters of James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe* (New York: Vintage, 1970). Remarkably, there is no book-length study of Nevsky in English. For a recent one in French, see Catherine Durand-Cheynet, *Alexandre Nevski, ou Le Soleil de La Russe.* (Paris: Perrin, 1983).
6. Eisenstein, *Immoral Memories: An Autobiography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), p. 226. Several leading Eisenstein scholars have argued that Stalin himself was the one who personally red-lined the Pavlenko-Eisenstein treatment, *Rus*. However, the evidence for Stalin's involvement is indirect. The manuscript is missing, and Eisenstein nowhere in his accounts of making *Nevsky* mentions Stalin directly by name. However, it was customary to revert to the passive construction, as Eisenstein does in "a hand other than mine," when referring to the Russian dictator.
7. Eisenstein, "P-R-K-F-V," *Notes of a Film Director.* Trans. X. Danko (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1946), p. 163.
8. Harlow Robinson, *Sergei Prokofiev* (New York: Paragon, 1988), pp. 351–53; Yon Barna, *Eisenstein* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 227–28. "By the way, after the catastrophe with M. [Meyerhold], who was supposed to stage my opera [*Semyon Kotko*], my first thought was to throw myself in pursuit of you and beg you to take on this production. The theatre was also very receptive to the suggestion, but you were in Asia and it seemed you would be busy there for some time—so I had to abandon my dream." (Prokofiev to Eisenstein, 30 July, 1939, in *Sergei Prokofiev 1953–1963: Stat'i i materialy*, eds. I. V. Nestyev and G. Ia Edel'man [Moscow, 1965], p. 279, unpubl. trans. Harlow Robinson.) Several Eisenstein sketches for *War and Peace* set designs are reproduced in Semyon Shlifstein, *Sergei Prokofiev* (Moscow: State Publisher's Music, 1965), pp. 94–95 and in *Stat'i i materialy*, pp. 272–73 and pp. 288–89.
9. For Eisenstein-Prokofiev working procedures, Eisenstein, "Vertical Montage," *Selected Works 2*, p. 371.
10. *Stat'i i materialy*, pp. 222–23, quoted in Robinson, p. 343; Arlynn Nellhaus, "Jean Cranmer Hosted Early DSO Artists," *The Denver Post*, 26 February, 1938; quoted in Robinson, p. 343.
11. According to legal notes prepared by his attorney Randolph Polk, Prokofiev visited Disney and studio composer Leigh Harline on 28 February, 1938, and played the score for *Peter and the Wolf*. See also the agreement, signed 27 March, 1938, giving Polk power of attorney for Prokofiev; and the agreement, signed 4 February, 1941, giving Disney motion picture rights to *Peter and the Wolf*. All documents in the Walt Disney Archives, The Walt Disney Company, Burbank, Calif.

    When Disney bought *Peter and the Wolf*, he was in the first stages of considering the expansion of the still uncompleted "The Sorceror's Apprentice" into a concert feature film. See David R. Smith, "The Sorceror's Apprentice: Birthplace of *Fantasia*," *Millimeter* 4 (Feb, 1976). By the end of the year, Disney was trolling for classical music to be used in *Fantasia* and in new versions of *Fantasia* that he hoped to make each year. For the broad

array of classical and gospel music Disney was considering for purchase at the time, see John Canemaker, "The *Fantasia* That Never Was," *Print* (Jan–Feb, 1988) esp. pp. 139–40. Eventually, *Peter and the Wolf* was animated for *Make Mine Music* (Disney, 1946).

12. Eisenstein chaired the festival jury which awarded Disney third prize for his Silly Symphonies cartoons. Later in the year, Eisenstein cited "The Three Little Pigs" as "the year's major film achievement in the advancement of art." *Eisenstein on Disney*, p. 91. See also Ian Christie and David Elliott, eds., *Eisenstein at Ninety* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art Oxford, 1988), p. 153.

    Eisenstein's longest analysis of Disney's work is a draft of an unfinished chapter on Disney originally written in 1940 for his unfinished book-length manuscript *Method*. The Disney chapter, supplemented by an unfinished revision and assorted unpublished workbook notes, has been anthologized in *Eisenstein on Disney*, trans. Alan Upchurch (London: Methuen, 1988).

    Eisenstein's admiring critiques of Disney's work—especially the Silly Symphony shorts—can be found throughout his late 1930s and early 1940s writings. See, for instance, "On Colour," [n/d, ca 1936] and *Vertical Montage* [1940], both reprinted in Eisenstein, *Selected Works, Volume 2*. See also the final chapter of *Nonindifferent Nature*, trans. Herbert Marshall (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 388–90.

13. For an account of how Disney and animator-director Wilfred Jackson developed the click track, see Ross Care, "Cinesymphony: Music and Animation at the Disney Studio 1928–1942," *Sight and Sound* 46 (Winter, 1976–77), pp. 40–41.

14. *New York Times*, 19 September, 1937, XI, 5:8, reports on Stokowski's involvement with pre-*Fantasia* multiple-channel recording film techniques. For Universal's *100 Men and a Girl*, released September, 1937, the conductor worked with six tracks and 14 microphones to cover the six principal divisions of the orchestra. For the richest account of Stokowski's recording "The Sorceror's Apprentice," see Smith, pp. 18–24 and 64–67.

    Prokofiev would not have been in time to witness either the actual track recording or the mixing of the nine tracks for "The Sorceror's Apprentice." The recordings were made in January, 1938, at the Selznick studio in Culver City.

15. Prokofiev describes the *Nevsky* recording experiments in "Muzyka v fil'me *Aleksandr Nevskii*," [Music in the Film *Alexander Nevsky*"], *Sovetskii istoricheskii fil'm* [*The Soviet Historical Film*] (Moscow, 1939), p. 27, unpub. trans. Harlow Robinson. For Prokofiev's involvement in the recording of *Nevsky* and his experiments with deliberate distortion, see Victor Seroff, *Sergei Prokofiev: A Soviet Tragedy* (New York: Taplinger, 1979), pp. 216–20; Israel V. Nestyev, *Prokofiev*, trans. Florence Jonas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960), p. 294.

16. For documents alluding to the technical difficulties of the Shorin sound systems, see Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, *The Film Factory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 118, 302, 308.

17. For Goberman's argument, see John Henken, "Rescoring 'Alexander Nevsky': Would Prokofiev Roll Over?" *Los Angeles Times*, Calendar Section (1 November, 1987), pp. 64–65. For an anecdotal account of the surprise Kremlin screening, see Victor Shklovsky, *Once Upon a Time* (Moscow, 1973), pp. 243–49, translated and quoted in Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda*, (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 122–23.

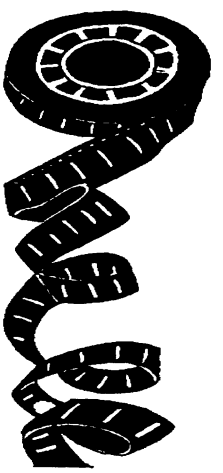
18. Taylor, p. 123, quotes Eisenstein's account of the missing reel. See also Eisenstein, "Alexander Nevsky," *Notes of a Film Director*, pp. 42–43, for an account of the extreme time pressure in meeting the "impossible" deadline of 7 November.

    For Eisenstein's request to shorten the battle, see Eisenstein, *Izbrannye poizvedeniya v shesti tomakh*, 5 (Moscow, 1964), p. 127. Eisenstein's notes are quoted in Rostislav Yurenev, *Sergei Eisenstein*, II (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988), p. 159: "Remake Mongols' cries. . . . Start Kliukvin's speech earlier . . . drowned by bell tolls. . . . Let Domash [Tverdislavich] enter [or exit?] by crowd's roar. . . . Record the chase louder. . . . " unpubl. trans., Yuri Tsivian. See also Eisenstein, letter to S. Dukelsky, 14 November, 1938; RGALI [Russia State Archive for Literature and Art], 1923/1/468, p. 3.

19. Eisenstein, "Alexander Nevsky," p. 43. Eisenstein writes to Prokofiev, 26 July, 1939, that "of course Volsky will again be working with us" on his proposed *Fergana Canal* project [Prokofiev, *Stat'i i materialy*, p. 278, unpubl. trans. Harlow Robinson]. He used Volsky on both parts of *Ivan the Terrible*.

20. Eisenstein, *Izbrannye poizvedeniya v shesti tomakh*, 6 (Moscow, 1964), p. 547; quoted and trans. in Taylor, *Film Propaganda*, p. 129.

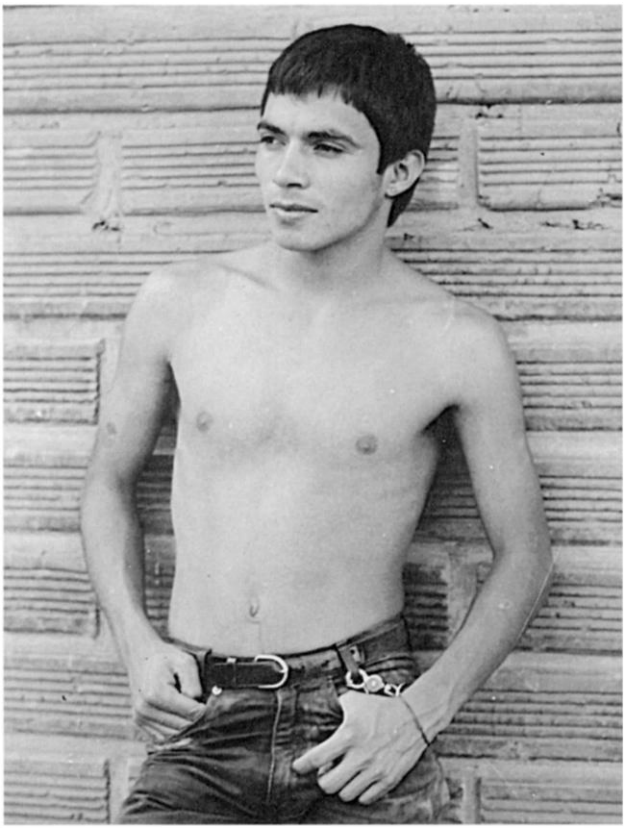
21. The fullest accounts of the restoration are by Nancy Shear: "*Alexander Nevsky*: A Masterwork Restored," *Ovation* (November 1987), pp. 20–22, and "New Life for a Classic Russian Film," *Symphony Magazine* (February/March, 1988), pp. 8–11.



Reviews

Rodrigo D.—No Futuro

Director: Víctor Gaviria. Producer: FOCINE. Screenplay: Ramón Correa, Juan Guillermo Arredondo, and Víctor Gaviria. Cinematographer: Rodrigo Lalinde. Music: Germán Arrieta and J. J. Mundo/Tiempos Modernos. Kino International.



Ramiro Meneses as Rodrigo in *Rodrigo D.*

In 1990, director Víctor Gaviria made a film based on the lives of some young men in the slums of Medellín, the second largest Colombian city, notorious for serving as home to the once most powerful drug cartel in the world. Gaviria's film is an account in the aesthetic tradition of Italian neorealism, using nonprofessionals as actors and exploiting the apparent crudeness of location shooting. The film's title is an homage to the Italian neorealist classic of the 1950s, *Umberto D.* Like the old pensioners in De Sica's story, the young hoodlums of *Rodrigo D.* repeatedly face death and have to struggle to survive in a society that does not want them. Successfully presented at Cannes and La Havana and co-winner at New York's Festival Latino Film Awards in 1990, the Colombian film brought international recognition to a cinema industry plagued with financial and bureaucratic problems. Praised by the media, it was generally reviewed along two main interpretive lines: one that acknowledged its debt to and reenactment of the neorealist aesthetic, and another that discussed it as a true rock film appropriating the codes of punk.

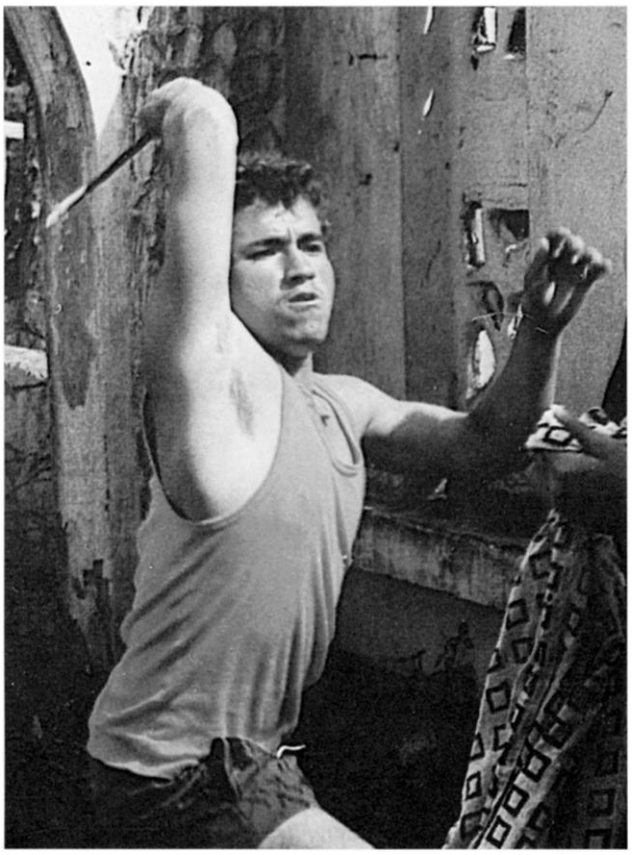
Poet and film-maker Víctor Gaviria was born in Medellín in 1955; his first films were a series of shorts: *Buscando tréboles* (1979), *Sueños sobre un mantel vacío* (1981), and *Músicos* (1986). In 1986 he began work on *Rodrigo D.*, a dramatization of life in the shanty towns of Medellín. The motivating forces behind the film, according to Gaviria and other members of the production team, were the concern generated by actions that shamelessly flirted with death and the hope of questioning the social distribution responsible for such a phenomenon. The script, which explores the nether world of Rodrigo and Ramón, two typical teenagers from the slums, was inspired by a 19-year-old youth's suicide attempt reported in the local press. Although the attempt failed, thanks to the intervention of a bystander, its drama is relived close to the film's end in the portrayal of Rodrigo's death. In this incident, the director recognized a powerful story that would serve not only as an opportunity to criticize the local oligarchy but also as an investigation of a youthful segment of his society with deeply disturbing values, most especially an enormous potential for violence—a trait that had rapidly led to manipulation by the local drug kingpins.

Gaviria employed working-class youths for the main roles and eschewed a linear plot, following his characters over several days as they play punk music, steal cars, and sell cocaine. According to the director, the script's first draft concentrated on the reconstruction of the suicide attempt and the events immediately preceding it: the main character's departure from home, his journey through the city, the way in which he managed to enter the building where his death was planned, and the encounter that dissuaded him from suicide. Many of these elements were changed as a result of Gaviria's discussions with the "actors." Indeed, it was they who, endorsing this as the only plau-

sible end to the narrative, suggested the change from failed suicide to death. A looser structure for the film was developed: by eliminating a "hero" or central character and allowing enough space for several individual story lines, the film set out to reflect the absence of hierarchy in local *pandillas* (gangs).

At the beginning we are introduced to the two most important characters, who will both die, albeit in very different fashions (while Rodrigo chooses to commit suicide, Ramón is executed by Adolfo, his fellow gang member). Their stories make up the film's two main narrative lines. Although heading toward the same fate, they follow separate paths and their progress is frequently intercut. In one instance, Rodrigo attends a punk reunion while Ramón participates in a robbery. In another, during Rodrigo's journey to a hospital, the sequence's continuity is interrupted by Adolfo's return home. Although not a principal character himself, Adolfo emerges as the catalyst in both stories. In the end, when he pulls the trigger on Ramón, we see Rodrigo about to throw himself from a building.

Practicing for the gang lifestyle



This parallel composition echoes the fluctuation between paradise and the abyss, where heights are blissful and life on earth is equivalent to hell. As Rodrigo seeks his own death, he explains that he has come to the building (from which he will later jump) to visit a lady. When asked to give her name, he responds with an onomastic twist, stating he is heading for the office of Dr. *Gloria Ampara* Alarcón—a name referring to a site of glory and shelter in death. It makes sense for him to search for glory and shelter in heights, since for him they are synonymous with heaven. This vertical insinuation isn't unusual in the story. In the beginning we are introduced to Rodrigo while he makes his way up the staircase of an empty building. He is looking for a briefcase, he states, before being sent down by the porter. Rodrigo is from the start on his way to death. He does not, however, choose the gang lifestyle. Although he socializes with gang members, it is only in and through music that he can find expression. He conceals himself in music, in his passion for punk rock, whose message of social protest and nonconformity he finds pleasing.

Ramón, however, embraces the way of the streets. He repeatedly breaks the law: he participates in a car theft, sells crack, and attempts to steal motorbikes, money, and watches. Ramón exemplifies the stereotypical *traqueto* (a young shanty-town hoodlum with links to the drug cartels) spirit, dangerous in his aimless wandering through life. He seeks comfort only for the sake of immediate gratification and pursues "jobs" that lead to easy money. He questions little and is excessively absorbed by his meaningless existence. Sooner or later he must die, victim of his own carelessness. Ramón is part of Gaviria's effort to fuse the distinct universes of punks and gangsters. His part is said to be loosely based on a youth the director met shortly before shooting and whose early death brought a tragic end to his participation in the project.

The film's virtue lies in how it manages to juxtapose both characters' stories to deftly portray the problem's complexity. Gaviria manipulates our vision of the city to reveal the inferno inhabited by these teenagers. This is not the media-portrayed thriving boom town with its luxurious mansions, satellite dishes, and expensive cars, but a network of registers fabricated around slums, misery, and social injustice.

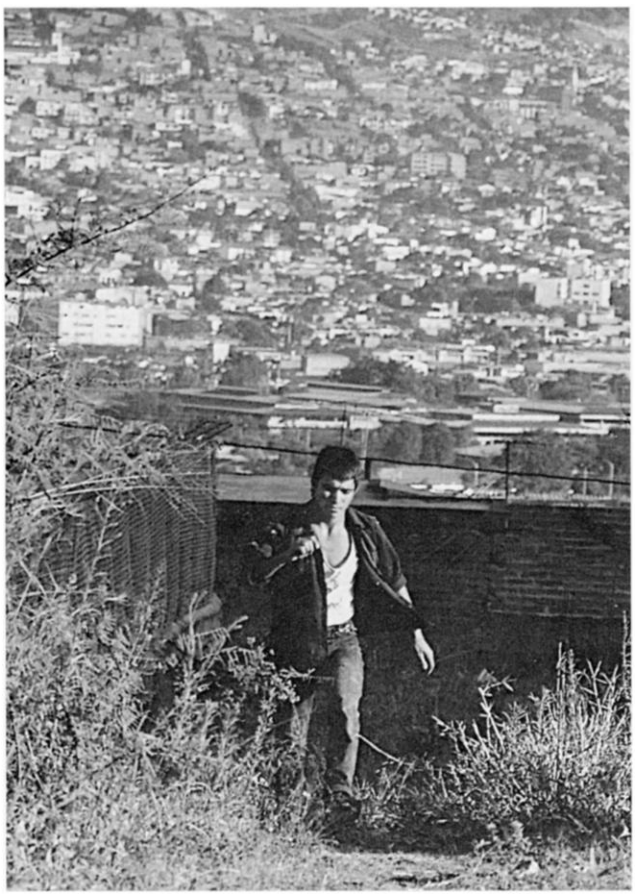
In Rodrigo's walk through the city we observe someone who gazes at death through fences and bars, as though he stood confined. Rigs with the word *peligro* (danger) traced in huge, bold characters sweep past him. We recall how a looming billboard advertisement for a particular brand of shoes implies the

crushing of the puny individual under the mighty sole of oppression. This place of bewilderment and defeat is enhanced by a score that reverberates: "Money: problems; money: anxiety; money: the system!" Rodrigo's world is one that sadly and stubbornly bonds him to earth.

Amidst all this disorientation, his only comfort is the passion he feels for punk rock, which drives him to seek solitude listening to tapes on the roof of his house. It is interesting to note that bands play on roofs and not in studios or closed spaces, another sign of the vertical hierarchy enforced upon the film's images. Music, as a cathartic element, is linked to the celestial. During a first visit to these rooftop spaces, Rodrigo's party is greeted by a barking dog that tries to keep them from ascending, or in this case, seeking a way out of their Hades, the streets of the slums.

Since they regard life as an ephemeral experience, many of these young people have no desire to live past 20. During a visit to his mother, Adolfo talks of his reluctance to live long, for he does not want to endure the enslavement he perceives in the lives of others. What Gaviria seeks to show in the film is that in a manner akin to the spirit of the Middle Ages, these youths relate death to a better, enlightened existence, while earthly life is just a transition, a hazardous one at that, and the best thing to do is to relinquish ties with it as soon as possible.

Trying to escape from Hades



The result of a vast immigration during the second half of the nineteenth century by descendants of Jewish converts, Antioquia, the state where Medellín is located, is a region widely respected for its entrepreneurial energies. Medellín's metropolitan area comprises a population nearly 3 million strong in the valley of Aburrá; the region is traditionally renowned for its industry and trade. The slopes of the northeastern range surrounding the city are home of the *comuna nororiental*, the setting for the story and where Gaviria chose to live for some months in order to assimilate the language and customs of the local gangs. It is a community firmly founded on the notion of money. Given the effect modernity has had, offering visions of lifestyles focused on consumerism to segments of the population that have little access to commodities, and considering the drastic social and economic differences present within the narrow urban map, it is easy to grasp why this younger stratum of society has opted instead for fast alternatives.

The social class that produced Rodrigo stems from the conflict between traditional *paisa* (native) culture, embodying the values of hard work, religion, and family, and the disruption instigated by the spirit of modernity, bringing with it the codes of punk and the rules of mass consumption. While the older generation still supports and enforces the virtues of old-fashioned economic success, the dissonance rooted in easy access to money foments the crisis of the social model for the younger generation. Religion, a legacy of the conservative *paisa* culture, has also played a major role in the enactment of the social order. Official Catholicism, transmitted by a repressive power that well into the twentieth century kept the custom of hourly tolling bells, nevertheless failed to consolidate a position as moral arbiter in Medellín. Amazingly, most *traquetos* uphold a firm faith in the Virgin Mary, even beyond their concern for Christ. A scene in the film shows a teen holding a wallet stuffer of María Auxiliadora to the beat of "No te desanimes, mátate" ("Cheer up, kill yourself").[1]

In 1984, the M-19 (a revolutionary group renowned for its failed attack on the Colombian Palace of Justice) was not yet politically viable (in spite of the ceasefire decreed by then President Betancur), and

resorted to the formation of recruitment camps in the steep hills of the Medellín slums. Much of the instruction, aside from routine ideological indoctrination, was of a military nature. In mid-1985, when this was declared illegal by the government, the sprouting of a literal army of the unemployed, trained but untested in the ways of war, was an obvious byproduct of the ironically named "peace" camps. Here lay the breeding ground for many of the leaders of the 120 gangs that later ran uncontrolled in Medellín. By August 1989, 70 per cent of violent deaths in that city occurred among those aged between 14 and 20, and such a trend began to have an impact in the national political arena. The figure of a teenager from the *comunas*, barely an adolescent, responsible for the assassination of high political figures and openly exhibiting a kamikaze élan in his criminal techniques, became a commonplace in Colombian eyes.

But as Medellín's well-being plummeted (it used to be known as *la ciudad de la eterna primavera*—the city of eternal spring), the youth of the slums developed a nurturing, if paradoxical, relationship with British punk rock. In a region with an underdeveloped taste for musical gaiety and rhythm, salsa and its variations encountered a sterile turf, while the strident message of punk readily advanced and allowed young men the possibility of identification and expression.[2] In the punk cult of nonconformity, the *pistolocos*, as punk's followers came to be known, found an echo and a response, a voice for their predicament.[3]

The sudden popularity of the punk creed was viewed as paradoxical by local sociologists, for its agenda preached broad contempt for the bourgeoisie and notions like brand loyalty, fashion, and consumerism were strictly frowned upon. The *pistolocos*, on the other hand, absorbed typically bourgeois concepts and professed high regard for trendy sneakers and powerful motorbikes. Perhaps because they based their mores on a highly visual culture, optical cues in their behavior and attire prevailed. Chuck Norris and Sylvester Stallone films were overt sources for independent training: "One has to know how to hold the gun, shoot and retreat. With movies we also learn a lot. We see action films, Chuck Norris, Black Cobra, Commando, Stallone, and check out how to hold guns, how to cover someone, how to retreat. That's all we talk about when we see films."[4]

Such quotes could lead to perhaps precipitous conclusions about the role of action cinematography. But images have succeeded in conquering the language. Among the most popular expressions one might cite a euphemism for the act of killing: *tomarle la foto*, literally, to take someone's picture. It is interesting to note that much of the coquettish ambivalence of these youths' relationship with death has modified their vocabulary, which is extensively used in the film. Upon a gang member's demise, the common thing is to hear farewells that more closely resemble congratulations. Such is the message uttered by a friend of Johncito, a youngster whose wake we witness near the end of the story. The friend proceeds to open the coffin, lament the bad luck of "those poor suckers that are still here," and congratulate the corpse. In the background we recognize the opening lyrics for the title song of Pink Floyd's album *Wish You Were Here*: "So you wish you could tell heaven from hell, blue skies from pain. . . . " These lyrics are key to understanding the technique Gaviria chose in the elaboration of a game between celestial open spaces and dark, gritty vignettes of the city.

In the cinematic language of neorealism and in punk, Gaviria found a mode of representation well suited to the issues. *Rodrigo D.* forced the country to face the extremes that resulted from widespread economic injustice. In that sense, the film was clearly a success. (Because of its low production costs, it was a financial breakthrough for FOCINE, struggling after a series of financial flops. The film's nationwide audience of 300,000 is considered high by Colombian standards.) Shortly after assuming office in 1990, President César Gaviria Trujillo created a special program for youth counseling in the slums of Medellín. The program, supported with money donated by the European community, has proved mildly successful.

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Notes

1. A theme of Mutantes, the local punk band for which Ramiro Meneses, the actor in the role of Rodrigo, plays in real life.
2. Only in recent years have Caribbean melodies achieved solid ground in Medellín, mostly as the result of heavy FM airplay and more contact with other provinces.
3. Parodying a national campaign against violence, *"La paz, un compromiso de todos,"* the album *La muerte, un compromiso de todos* (*Death, a commitment by everyone*), by La Pestilencia, a punk band from Bogotá, became the bestselling Colombian rock album of the 1980s.
4. Salazar, Alonso J. "La resurreción de Desquite." *No nacimos pa' semilla—La cultura de las bandas juveniles de Medellín*, 7th ed. (Santa Fe de Bogotá: CINEP, 1990).

I Don't Want to Talk About It

Director/writer: Maria Luisa Bemberg. Producer: Oscar Kramer. Cinematographer: Felix Monti. Music: Nicola Piovani. Art director: Jorge Sarudiansky. Sony Pictures Classics.

If Buñuel had been a woman, he might have made *I Don't Want to Talk About It (De eso no se habla),* but would he have engendered controversy over his feminism? The feminist who did direct it, Argentinian Maria Luisa Bemberg, wears the Buñuel mantle lightly, but has been hit by friendly fire from feminists for her vision of woman as dwarf. Indeed, *I Don't Want to Talk About It* reflects such a complex view of mothers, daughters, freaks, artists, and decadents—without coming to any happy or definitive statement—that we are forced to talk about it and all the things it says we don't want to discuss. In an Age of Political Correctness, Bemberg challenges our beliefs in assimilation, shows us the absurdity of suppressed speech, and rebukes a society in which only men can be tolerated as outsiders. And she takes on freaks. She traps us between denial and voyeurism.

When Bemberg declares that her film must be understood as a fable or fairy tale and in the next breath claims it as her most autobiographical work, you need to know that Bemberg was brought up in a stiflingly proper and wealthy Argentinian family, married, and raised four children before she broke out, divorced, began writing screenplays in 1971, and debuted as a director in 1981 at the age of 56. In 1984, her elegant historical love story, *Camila,* received an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film. She was a success by artistic standards, but she had lost the position she once enjoyed in the innermost circle of Argentina's elite, where respectable women were neither workers nor artists. And she is harshly criticized (particularly by the Church) as an artist and frequently ostracized as a mad feminist. "But I don't like talking about it," she finds herself saying, laughing at herself, then explaining, "It's not the interesting part of my life."

By its title alone, *I Don't Want to Talk About It* cleverly forces us out of the denial it proclaims for its subject. It is the story of a widow who will not acknowledge that her only child will never "grow up." Set in a South American town where the locals drift into a kind of collusion with the mother's denial, the film moves through the points-of-view of the three protagonists with subtlety and tolerance of their extreme differences. Carlotta is a dwarf in a society hidebound by normalcy. The telling achondroplastic

Leonor (Luisina Brando) with the Police Chief

Ludovico D'Andrea (Marcello Mastroianni) with Madame

features of a dwarf do not age in the usual sense; although we watch her "grow up," Carlotta is forever young. The intrinsic danger here is that we, the viewers, continue to see her as a child and commit the same mistake as her loved ones—from whom she must escape in order to enjoy any kind of autonomy.

We enter the fictional San Jose de los Altares (filmed in the historic old city of Colonia on the Uruguayan shore opposite Buenos Aires) on Carlotta's fifth birthday. Her mother, Leonor, is giving her a party. As the camera pans the faces of the other mothers, caricatures in exaggerated 1930s hats and prim expressions, their whispers and averted gazes betray the potential for scandal in a colonial backwater. And when one woman, who is herself the mother of a deaf-mute child, tries to sympathize with Leonor, Leonor distances herself from any such "recognition" of Carlotta's deformation. Although Bemberg utilizes a village priest to his full comic and dramatic potential, she never touches on superstitions that used to see in a deformed child some form of divine retribution on the mother; or an even earlier association of dwarfism with witchcraft and devilry. An amusing social defiance marks Leonor's motherhood: late at night she purges the town of every symbol that might reflect her daughter, destroying a neighbor's garden dwarfs and burning children's books about little people.

Leonor perfects her imperfect child in every possible way, giving Carlotta a prodigious education and cultivating her musical and linguistic talents so that she is living proof that Leonor is a perfect mother. The child learns French so well—the very measure of civilization—that she prefers to be called "Charlotte." Voilá, her transformation is complete. She becomes such an exemplary product of bourgeois ideals that her physical otherness seems trivial. By the end of the first act, we are ready to side with Leonor for insisting on her daughter's normalcy.

Charlotte is so accomplished that when her mother arranges for her to perform a piano recital (to the horror of other mothers), Charlotte acquits herself of the task elegantly. But it is here that we see the seeds of defiance. Leonor advises Charlotte to be already seated on the piano bench when the curtain rises. But the child proudly prances on stage, minces as any young girl would, scales the piano bench, and demonstrates that Schumann is impervious to size. She has learned more from her independent-minded mother than Leonor may have intended.

Enter Ludovico D'Andrea, man of the world, an Italian, and an outsider capable of seeing Charlotte as someone who, like himself, exists apart from the crowd. In the scenes of them together, the camera is restless until the inevitable close-up of Charlotte's

wide-eyed trust. Ludovico tells her of faraway places and she listens avidly, accepting his every tale and fantasy. Marcello Mastroianni in the role of eligible bachelor appeals to all the women in town (nor can the audience forget Mastroianni's stock-in-trade as cinema's most ambivalent seducer).

Leonor turns to Ludovico when she needs help in getting her daughter a birthday present—a horse. Ludovico brings back a Shetland pony, and Leonor erupts: the mini-horse nearly breaks the taboo of silence. Ludovico apologetically backtracks and gives Charlotte a beautiful palomino. In a world of magical realism, it is this white horse, this Pegasus, that endows sexuality and empowers Charlotte. In many ways, Ludovico plays her liberator, and that he gives her the horse rather than riding in on it himself deftly foreshadows the way she will, in the end, ride off with the circus.

His first sight of the girl training the horse stirs an uncontrollable passion in Ludovico. He attempts to flee her power over him, but some indeterminate number of years later, he returns to ask for her hand in marriage. This request sends her mother, the priest, and the entire town into fits of objection. Charlotte's response, however, has no giddy nervousness about it. In her quiet, self-possessed way, she accepts.

The old mayor, who is to give the girl away, dies in the middle of the marriage ceremony—threatening to foil Leonor's ambitions. But with the help of her shop assistant, she packs the body in ice, so as to keep the death a secret until the next day. There is no obstacle Leonor cannot overcome in order to present her daughter as perfection. (Leonor's power of denial is surpassed by that of the film's publicists, who had no photos made of Alejandra Podesta, who plays Charlotte, lest we learn the "secret" of the movie.) When the musicians announce that it is time for the bride and groom to dance, we cut to Leonor's grim reaction—yet another obstacle for her, and we share her panic. But Mastroianni saves the moment by lifting little Charlotte up to his height as he swirls her away. It is a mystical moment of wedding dress and white sand and blazing light as they leave the wedding guests and embark on the great adventure of marriage. At once romantic and sly, this scene plays out the archetypal happy ending with a sleight of hand learned from Fellini. It's only the end of the second act; could this be love?

The fetishization of the dwarf is an inevitable risk of a picture like this, and Bemberg steers a discreet course around it. She makes it quite clear that Charlotte herself is a sexual creature: the young girl prances before a mirror; we see flirtation in her eyes; the palomino is the symbol of her sexual prowess. Mastroianni's love is the linchpin of the fairy tale that Charlotte is a full, complete woman with a psyche as strong as an Amazon.

Yet we never hear much from the object of desire. Is her silence that of the town, whose speech has been suppressed by Leonor? Or is she keeping the peace until the right moment? Bemberg comments on the girl's passivity by citing the French critic Roland Barthes' observation that "the amorous object never talks." "I thought that was quite interesting," notes Bemberg, "to have the girl like a catalyst to make his story appear. And I gave my character the name of Charlotte, the object of Werther's love in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*." Most of Charlotte's dialogue is given over to questions in which she explores others (most deftly when she asks her mother if she's thought of marrying Ludovico herself). Yet the girl's silence is not sadness, nor even, I would argue, resignation. It seems much more the reticence of someone with the faith that freedom is something gained in stages rather than

revolutions. Someone like Maria Luisa Bemberg. For women who have lived both kinds of lives, this metaphor is not as offensive as for women born liberated.

I Don't Want to Talk About It is also a film about getting out from under the thumb of a well-intentioned mother in order to claim one's individual identity. A dedication is scrawled across the screen over the opening of the film, declaring its intention: "This tale is dedicated to all people who have the courage to be different in order to be themselves." A physical deformity, however, is not the same as a talent or a gift. It might be flattering to make the parallel between physically challenged people and the artist, and there's no reason any individual dwarf would not be as sensitive or talented as any particular artist, but there is a definite temerity in comparing a physical handicap to a social or psychological condition.

The separate reality of "freaks," known to us previously in Werner Herzog's *Even Dwarfs Start Small* or Todd Browning's *Freaks,* or in the characters played by the actor Michael Dunne, is the source of the discomfort created by the film. Carlotta *is* a dwarf, and moreover, "the end" is not the end of the story. The woman who plays Carlotta, Alejandra Podesta, is not a Meryl Streep with a good accent, but a non-actress who lives and works in Buenos Aires. Her achondroplastic image is on the screen more than half the time, and we have ample opportunity to measure her humanity against her freakiness. And tenderness outdistances any quality that could be exploited by P.T. Barnum.

"I suppose," Bemberg speculates, "if the film had been directed by Buñuel or Fellini, it would probably have been much funnier. And maybe more ferocious. But I never wanted to make fun of her. Art and ethics go hand in hand. It would have been wrong to be cruel with this young girl, who was doing her very best to make her first movie, and in which reality and fiction are so painfully criss-crossed. She finishes at the end of her day and goes back to her poor little house with her lonely mother. And she still is the character, still a little dwarf. I was very maternal with her. I still am."

The final sequence begins with the fictional mother tending her husband's gravestone. As we watch her polish his plaque, we can't help but reflect on how well she has managed her mission to steer her daughter into a moribund society. Leonor's will and power are impressive; but fate is impervious to human design, and in the distance we hear the caterwaul of trumpets and drums. (This inimitable circus sound cannot be heard without thinking of Fellini's *8 1/2*, a daunting comparison to invoke in the final flourishes of a movie.)

Bemberg doesn't even take us inside the circus, a decision that maintains the "silence" imposed by Leonor, who forbids her daughter to attend the circus. At this point it is not only suppression of expression and freedom; it is "structured absence." We are forced to consider what in the circus could change Charlotte: a caged lion? a trapeze artist? a midget act? It is no particular person or thing, of course, but the circus as a concept. This is the place where Leonor would least like to see her daughter, because any possible comparison with a freak of nature would be in bad taste. A "mother's instinct," as she calls it, warns her of an unknown hand that could claim an unknown part of her daughter.

The shocking loss of a closely watched maiden is the driving mechanism of Demeter and Persephone, Madame de Volange and Cecile (*Les Liaisons Dangereuses*), Eliane and Camille (*Indochine*), or Cocteau's *Orpheus*. The mythic tenor of the film's final sequence is reinforced by a narrator describing the marriage of Ludovico and Charlotte: "Time went by slowly, like that which is forever." When Charlotte slips from bed and we see her in the darkness of the circus grounds, moving stealthily but surely among the tents, wagons, and cages, there is no doubt she is at home. Another achondroplastic face is seen dimly in the half-light; although it is not clearly a dwarf, it smiles and welcomes her.

"Running away with the circus" is not just the classic escape; the circus is for Charlotte a place where whatever she is, she is the norm. The malformations of the circus can be a mirror of our "secret self," as Fellini intended in his pageantry of ever-present freaks. Bemberg wisely refrains from speculating on the potential lurch into melodrama and only shows Charlotte riding away on her white horse, wearing a crown. The paradox is that the less said, the more metaphoric and less pathetic is the creature.

General Tom Thumb, who was a Connecticut Yankee put on display in the English court of Victoria and Albert, wrote, "God has given me a small body, but I believe He has not contracted my heart, nor brain, nor soul. . . . " Given the rich tradition of little people, what's not to talk about? Speech insists on Charlotte's reality; silence is the secret to the poetry of a Charlotte. Bemberg has made a film that makes us choose.

■ Karen Jaehne has finished her first novel, *Unpopular Positions*.

Book Reviews

Cinema and Spectatorship

By Judith Mayne. New York: Routledge, 1993. $49.95 cloth; $16.95 paper.

Judith Mayne's *Cinema and Spectatorship* is a long overdue and welcome reassessment of the major paradigms of spectatorship formulated in the 1970s. In the first, and most important, part of the book, Mayne offers a useful, well-reasoned survey of a field whose diverse fragments have been some of the driving forces of film scholarship over the last 30 years but which have never been pulled together under one coherent rubric.

The first chapter provides a critical overview of the key concepts of classical spectatorship in 1970s film theory. It is a clear introduction to the primary concept of the work of ideology in the image. Using Althusser and Barthes, Mayne delineates the main features of the intersection of psychoanalysis and ideology in film theory of the 1970s. Key concepts such as desire, the gaze, and identification are introduced through the grand theorists such as Althusser, Barthes, and Mulvey, as well as through more textually oriented theorists such as Bellour, Heath, and Kuntzel.

The second chapter examines the influential notion of the cinematic apparatus that emerged out of this same ideological and psychoanalytic theoretical nexus. Here, Mayne distinguishes two opposed terms common to discussion of spectatorship: the "viewer" or real person, who sits before the film and who has been the focus of ethnographic and cultural studies approaches, and the hypothetical "subject" of the film's discourse, who has been the focus of psychoanalytic and ideological theory. Mayne proposes that "spectatorship occurs at precisely those spaces where 'subjects' and 'viewers' rub up against each other."

Thus Mayne refuses to play out a simple either/or conflict between empirical viewers and theoretical subjects, proposing instead that the continued interest in spectatorship derives from ongoing and productive tensions between the two approaches. This redefinition of spectatorship as the tension between real viewers and cinematic subjects breathes new life into a concept that was in danger of becoming too allied with the orthodoxies of psychoanalytic and ideological notions of the subject.

A third chapter, "Spectatorship Reconsidered," focuses on approaches to spectatorship that have emerged from more recent criticisms of the apparatus model. These are: empirical, ethnographic, and cultural studies models which have variously attempted to replace the hypothetical subject of apparatus theory with real spectators; historical studies which have focused on specific forms of film reception; and feminist approaches which have focused on the differences gender makes in spectatorship. In keeping with her determination not to schematize the opposition between real viewers and hypothetical subjects of discourse "positioned" by texts, Mayne does not simply counter the monolithic ideological subject with the diverse ethnographic, historical, and gender differences of real viewers. Instead, she concentrates on the ways cinema is describable within the terms of ideological and psychoanalytic theory *and* within the terms of social, historical, racial, and other differences.

The payoff of this approach is in her fourth, and best, chapter, "Paradoxes of Spectatorship." Here Mayne argues that the "classical" model of the subject constructed by the text too easily assumed fixed ideological and psychic effects on spectators and needs to be viewed as a more complex set of paradoxes. There is no simple division between a cinema that functions as an instrument of dominant ideology and a cinema that challenges such ideology. This is Mayne's first, and most important, paradox: the competing claims of a cinema viewed as homogeneous institution (as in 1970s apparatus theory) and the heterogeneity of different spectators (of different races, classes, genders, socializations, and subcultural affinities) who engage with it. Mayne points out that if the cinematic apparatus had been as fully saturated with idealist ideology and Oedipal desire as apparatus theory had argued, then nothing in cinema would ever have changed. Since cinema has changed, she proposed to examine the tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity—the "in between" of the competing claims of domination and resistance.

Mayne first examines the gap between cinematic address—the way a text addresses spectators and in so doing assumes certain spectatorial responses—and cinematic reception—the actual conditions of reception which may, or may not, facilitate this response with an actual viewer. Where *address* concerns an ideal viewer, *reception* concerns a real viewer. As Mayne puts it, "[I]t is one thing to assume that cinema is determined in ideological ways . . . to assume, that is, that the various institutions of the cinema *do* project an ideal viewer, and another thing to assume that those projections *work*." Her point is not that apparatus theories are wrong but that

they are incomplete. Mayne is careful to note, however, that reception studies of real audiences can be just as incomplete. For all its emphasis on the real reader or viewer, cultural studies often idealizes the contestatory capabilities of its viewers.

The second "in between" Mayne examines is the realm of fantasy. In fantasy, Mayne finds the best reasons to retain some elements of the psychoanalytic model of spectatorship, for psychoanalytic theory provides a useful model of the relation of the spectator to the image-discourse of cinema. The crucial lesson of fantasy is that the fantasist, like the spectator, does not necessarily identify in any fixed way with a character, a gaze, or a particular position, but rather with a series of oscillating positions which fantasy's mise-en-scène of desire facilitates. Fantasy is most importantly an imaginary scene, a place for the staging of desire. In this it is like the cinema. But it is not necessarily the enactment of a single character's desire. Its pleasures are the pleasures of mobility, of moving around among a range of different desiring positions. Again, however, this mobility does not make a particular film or genre automatically liberatory.

Mayne also points out that most discussion of fantasy tends to assume that sexual difference is the ultimate binary out of which fantasy proceeds, thus collapsing what would seem to be the varieties of desire into a master code of heterosexual desire. In other words, fantasy can engage with the complex effects of spectatorship, but we need a better understanding of how the categories of sexual difference, and desire itself, are culturally variable.

The third term to encapsulate the "in between" homogeneity and heterogeneity of film spectatorship is *negotiation*. Cultural studies uses the term to describe a reader or viewer's often ambivalent engagement with the "dominant" ideology of a text. To Stuart Hall, negotiated readings stand midway between dominant readings, which are consistent with the ideology of a text, and oppositional readings, which go totally against it. The social formations of audiences are usually seen as determining the ways in which a text will be negotiated so as to shape mass culture to an audience's needs. Again, Mayne is highly suspicious of the liberatory effects of such negotiation. She insists, however, that negotiation is an important term so long as we remember that no negotiation is inherently oppositional and that the identities conducting the negotiation are, as Christine Gledhill puts it, contradictory and changing. Mayne concludes: "The challenges to apparatus theory described in this chapter return to the problem of identification, as if to suggest that however mobile and multiple subject positions may be, spectatorship still engages some notion of identity."

The rest of Mayne's book consists of four chapters devoted to what she calls "Readings of Spectatorship"—case studies of particular films or groups of films as they relate to spectatorship. After the clarity, reasonableness, and punch of the first part of the book, some of these chapters seem anticlimactic. A study of the trope of portraiture in Albert Lewin's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* is used to advance the now familiar point that there is no automatic equivalence between spectatorship in the classical cinema and men possessing women. A study of the star persona of Bette Davis is used to advance the dynamic between stardom and spectatorship. Both of these are interesting reading, but they do not appreciably add to the main points of the volume. A more ambitious chapter on *Ghost* and *Field of Dreams* sets out to examine the relation of fantasies of race to genre. While this chapter is consistently interesting in its examination of white spectatorship, the genre elements of the study are only cursorily treated.

A final chapter on the difficulties of identifying and speaking for the film audience is more substantial and a fitting conclusion to this fine study. Here Mayne examines the kind of audience research—in the form of reviews or audience surveys—which arose in the backlash against purely textual and apparatical analyses. She argues that any analytic conception of the audience, no matter how grounded in real viewers, involves a considerable amount of projection and myth. Choosing the phenomenon of the gay and lesbian audience as her topic, Mayne brings another important paradox to light: the importance of criticizing the fictions of identity while at the same time affirming the partaking of identity. In other words, while she is supportive of audience research and the quest for the distinctive identities of audiences, Mayne is suspicious of the kind of research that assumes marginal audiences to be automatically empowered, active, or contestatory.

There is no question that 1970s views of spectatorship are in need of revision. The monolithic subject positioned and conditioned by the text has proven much more socially and historically diverse than Metz, Baudry, Mulvey, or Wollen even allowed. Yet Judith Mayne shows us that the current, and quite legitimate, backlash against the blindnesses of this theory should not let us lose sight of the fact that there is still a compelling need to characterize and critically assess the nature of spectatorial relations to moving images. Nor should it let us lose sight of the fact that these relations encompass the psychic as well as the social, the viewer as well as the subject.

LINDA WILLIAMS

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The Cinema of Eisenstein

By David Bordwell. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993. $65.00 cloth; $29.95 paper.

In his *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, David Bordwell sets out to provide a "straightforward introduction" to Eisenstein's complex film practice and theory, with emphasis on deepening the understanding of his unique accomplishments both within the context of Soviet culture from the 1920s through the late 1940s, and with respect to world cinematic style. He achieves this goal elegantly—and much more!

Bordwell begins with a brief creative biography that provides the overall political and cultural context for Eisenstein's work and locates key stages in his practice and theory with respect to both Russia's modernist left-wing movements (e.g., Constructivism) and the more ideological groups such as the Proletarian Culture Organization. He does not dwell on areas of Eisenstein's life where we lack definitive information (his romantic life; his politics), deferring such questions until new information becomes available from archives currently being opened. The central issue for Bordwell is Eisenstein's cinema *poetics* and how it emerged from specific problems of exciting the audience "perceptually, emotionally, and intellectually." (37)

He treats in detail all of Eisenstein's major works from the silent films of the 1920s through the unrealized projects of the 1930s to the sound films *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible*, examining the contemporaneous theorizing as well: Eisenstein's engaged film writings of the 1920s, his pedagogical work in the mid-1930s, and the major body of his mature theoretical writings from the mid-1930s to his death in 1948. What emerges from these chapters is the exciting portrait of an experimental artist who was always enriching his modernist practice with ideas from diverse historical and cultural traditions and applying them to problems of emotional and intellectual arousal.

One of the high points of Bordwell's presentation is his documentation of substantial changes in Eisenstein's methods as he moves from one film to the next. Here Bordwell combines his own perceptive analysis with Eisenstein's comments on structural devices and strategies for inducing emotions in the spectator, from dramatic collisions of diverse material to associative metaphors and dynamic visual design. Eisenstein doesn't hesitate to use nondiegetic material in his associative montage (e.g., the slaughter of a cow intercut with soldiers shooting workers) or to prolong the duration of emotionally charged moments by overlapping action. As Bordwell crisply puts it: "the action becomes 'quasi-diegetic,' hovering between the story world and a realm of abstract, emblematic significance." (42)

Nondiegetic associative inserts (a stone lion statue seemingly "roaring" as a result of a rapidly edited sequence of stills) and overlapping action underscore the emotional climaxes in *Battleship Potemkin*, but Eisenstein also develops new approaches not so evident in his first film, *Strike*. Each of the *Potemkin*'s five reels is unified as an "act," with a dramatic shift in its action occurring at a "caesura" within and a culminating "attraction"—a plate is smashed in a doubled motion or a ship's prow knifes into the audience. Bordwell examines the "elaborate symmetries" among the acts, and the recurrence of motifs such as those involving hands, a single eye, or glasses.

To this array of techniques is added, in *October*, Eisenstein's celebrated "intellectual montage," the use of imagery to induce concepts. Eisenstein removes objects from their diegetic context and uses them as visual metaphors, especially when filming in the Winter Palace. As Bordwell puts it: "The toys, cutlery, plates, glassware, and other luxury goods are evidently in the palace, but they are filmed in such intense close-ups or framed against such neutral backgrounds that they seem to hover in a purely symbolic space." (85) Bordwell shows how the film is methodically organized around pairs of oppositional images of the enemies (the provisional government, Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries) and the Bolsheviks, images counterposing buffoonery to heroism, "languid inertia" to "purposeful activity," "ornate decadence" to "streamlined functionality." Many paired images create these semantic oppositions: Kerensky sits or struts—Lenin gestures vigorously or hurls himself atop an armored car; Kerensky toys with a crystal decanter—Lenin's teapot boils over an open fire near his twig haystack-hut. Statues metaphorically and metonymically comment on Kerensky and his forces; machinery (mechanized weapons, printing presses) is arrayed on the side of the Bolsheviks. The weaving of a motivic web of images creates Eisenstein's "intellectual montage," as images of harps and balalaikas intercut with Menshevik orators elaborate ideas of a feminized passivity and "saccharine sanctimony." (86) The famous sequence of the Gods uses a series of religious statues (declining from Christian through Asian to animist wood carvings), "suggesting the primitive origins of the concept." (92)

In *The Old and the New*, Eisenstein's film about the bounties of collectivization and the unity of countryside and city, the director's pattern of building films around semantic oppositions continues. Bordwell calls attention to the importance of a new technological innovation, the 28mm or wide-angle lens, in making more palpable Eisenstein's "montage within the frame," as when the

poor peasant heroine Marfa Lapkina's thin body in the background is contrasted with the extremely close (and hence unusually enlarged) foreground image of a Kulak's fat sheep. Eisenstein often uses foreground images as he uses close-ups, to "cut signs loose from their exact locales" and incline the viewer toward metaphorical readings. One aspect which anticipates Eisenstein's audiovisual montage of the late 1930s is the emphasis on "overtonal" montage, linking shots according to intensifying (and simultaneously oppositional) "secondary" traits, such as the heat, thirst, and delirium which crescendo in images of a religious procession, or the montage celebration of ejaculation, fecundity, and nurturance in the famous montage sequence of the cream separator.

Internal speech, vertical montage, pathos construction, and ecstasy are the central concepts in Eisenstein's theorizing in the latter part of his life. Bordwell does a brilliant job of elucidating both the origins of these concepts and their interrelationships. But the most original part of his treatment here is the argument that Eisenstein's turn toward features such as unity, harmony, and thematic focus in transforming his earlier conceptions was a reaction to the mandatory (if somewhat imprecise) edicts of Party-canonized Socialist Realism. As Bordwell puts it, Eisenstein attempted "to lift certain premises of Socialist Realism to the realm of serious aesthetic reflection," (165) at the same time providing a rationale for "not only form-centered but also downright Formalist" research. Departing from Vygotsky on "inner speech" and Levy-Brul on "sensuous thought," Eisenstein elaborates a concept of the art work as a complex synthetic *obraz* (image) which appeals to both emotional and cognitive processes simultaneously. Thus, as Bordwell was one of the first to emphasize years ago, instead of calling for "collision" between elements of montage, Eisenstein now envisions them as possessing organic similarities and as reinforcing one another.

This leads to vertical montage. Shots are seen as linked through the "simultaneous movement" of various "motifs" (by analogy with a musical score), from graphic composition and color to sound. As Bordwell notes, Eisenstein moves more toward a "Romantic" position—the artist's own emotion, as bound to the theme, is inspirationally embodied in the vertical montage; the artwork "becomes the site of an emotional communion between artist and perceiver." (191) Thus, Eisenstein arrives at *ecstasy*—in Bordwell's words, "ecstasy results from the overwhelming organic-dialectical unity of the artwork." (193)

In his book's penultimate chapter, Bordwell returns to Eisenstein's films and projects of the 1930s and 1940s: the uncompleted *Que Viva Mexico!* and *Bezhin Meadow*, and the historical epics *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible*. He now seamlessly integrates into his analyses the insights elaborated in the two preceding theoretical chapters. Bordwell discusses (among many other things) Eisenstein's creation of parallels and antinomies between each film's big scenes; the sharp contrasts among interweaving motifs along both formal and semantic lines; the stylized use of expressive movement; the predominant strategy of organizing montage-units with *axial* cuts between shots; the use of thrusting character-movement toward the camera/spectator; and the audiovisual correspondences achieved through vertical montage in *Nevsky* and *Ivan* (with Prokofiev's scores). Bordwell's treatment of audiovisual motifs (recurrent objects, graphic patterns, colors, and sound-track melodies) in *Ivan the Terrible* owes a clear and acknowledged debt to the work of Kristin Thompson, but he also extends her insights about metaphorical interpretation of these complexly interwoven "elusive, open-ended" motifs. This section has a particularly detailed analysis of the cutting of the montage units and of the gestural strategies within them, richly illustrated with reference to accompanying stills (over 70 of them in the 50 pages of text in this chapter).

Bordwell saves his review of other critics' and theoreticians' work on Eisenstein for his final chapter, tracing the history of "the making and remaking of Sergei Eisenstein" through stages of left-wing enthusiasm, recognition as a champion of Soviet dialectical montage, Stalinist condemnation as a sterile "formalist," Western critique as a propagandist, valorization as the father of experimental modernism, and praise as a semiotician of the arts par excellence. Bordwell's choice of chapter order is very felicitous; the reader can make much more sense of this variety of interpretations knowing all that has been presented in the preceding chapters. Finally, in a careful and measured summary, Bordwell recapitulates in six pages his own assessment of Eisenstein's most unique and enduring contributions: the "totally composed" fictional film with its dense "modernist" motivic recurrences on many levels, and a *techne*-centered cinepoetics aimed at a "maximal excitation of the spectator." (270)

Not everyone will agree with Bordwell's emphasis, and this is sure to be a source of lively debate, for example, about Bordwell's assertion that Eisenstein's work "subordinates political doctrine to the principles and procedures of artistic 'making'." (270) Those who find themselves in essential agreement with Bordwell (like this reviewer) will be encouraged to pursue further investigation of matters which intrigue them. Further work needs to be done, as well, on the multivalent "semanticization" of graphic as well as object motifs within Eisenstein's films. Bordwell's *techne*-centered template of Eisenstein's creative work effectively marks

out the boundaries for future studies of style and structure in the director's films as well as for elaborations and contestations of his theories. In this sense, Bordwell has set an agenda for the next stage of Eisenstein study at the same time that he has provided a wonderfully rich view of Eisenstein's genius for the general reader.

HERBERT EAGLE

■ Herbert Eagle teaches at the University of Michigan and is director of its Residential College. He has published widely on Russian and East European film.

Classical Hollywood Narrative

The Paradigm Wars

Edited by Jane Gaines. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992. $50.00 cloth; $15.95 paper.

This book is no more than the sum of its parts. Announcing itself as a sustained attempt to confront the dominance of the paradigm of Hollywood classical cinema and to readjust our theoretical concepts in the light of challenges to that dominance, both from theory and from developments within the media themselves, what the book actually delivers is a series of essays none of which is less than interesting, but most of which approach the project from a somewhat elliptical angle.

Rick Altman's response is one of those to engage more directly with the paradigm. Starting from an impressively documented demonstration that early cinema derived its narratives not directly from novels but from popular theatrical versions of them, he argues that the very concept of "classical" in relation to American cinema is a misnomer, because its theatrical origins always marked it with the melodramatic romanticism of the stage.

The two essays which follow are less about the nature of the paradigm which governs film theory and more about the philosophical foundations of criticism itself. Bill Nichols confronts head-on the attempt by David Bordwell and others to replace 1970s film theory, which privileged questions of ideology, with a neoformalist mode. In Nichols' views, the weakness of the Bordwell position is its apparent insouciance toward everything that makes people take up positions about film. It can only conceive of the viewer as genderless, classless, stateless. Norman Holland, by contrast, sees the spectator as the weak point in *Screen* theory, and defends the Bordwellian project of replacing this theory with a form of cognitive psychology as a way of finding out how real people actually respond to films.

The five essays which follow make more specific interventions. Janet Staiger, in an account of *The Return of Martin Guerre*, addresses the question of how far contemporary theory and the film-making practices it has encouraged have destroyed the truth-claims of the classical historical film. Christine Gledhill, in a comparison of American and British film melodramas, reaches a conclusion not too distant from Altman, that in American classical cinema the realism usually assumed to be its dominant aesthetic was in fact adulterated with melodrama. Miriam Hansen does not so much challenge the paradigm as produce a reading of its psychopathology through a Freudian analysis of *Intolerance* in terms of Griffith's struggle with the figure of the prostitute, central both to his own psychic development and to his conception of cinema itself.

Chris Straayer argues that the figure of the "Sheman," who displays attributes of both male and female sexualities, has not only challenged the rigid sexual difference which the classical paradigm both institutes and demands as a condition of its own reproduction, but, in her term, has actually "dismantled" it. This is a large claim, and one which goes to the heart of the issue of the paradigm. If classical cinema is ultimately held in place by the structures of patriarchal and capitalist society, can it in fact be dismantled while those structures remain (more or less) intact? Straayer's argument that it has collapsed is based to a large extent on what has happened in avant-garde cinema. But by definition the avant-garde is not the mainstream, and the paradigm is a theory of what happens in popular cinema. It would be interesting to know how far Straayer thinks the astonishing success of *The Crying Game*, both in terms of ticket sales and as an objective of critical discourse, is evidence of this dismantling, or is rather one of those accommodations which patriarchy is so practiced at.

Jane Gaines, the editor of the collection, offers an ingenious and original contribution on the difficulties produced by legal definitions of property rights and the right to privacy when put against film theory's conceptualization of the image. The strategy of setting film theory against other discourses is likely to prove a productive way forward, and as her subsequent book, *Contested Cultures,* has shown, Gaines has hit a rich vein.

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Both the remaining essays are also about television. John Thompson, in a droll and bravely original essay, looks at the contemporary TV talk-show through the lens of history, comparing it to the long-dead literary genre of the Dialogue of the Dead. Again, while estimable, this essay seems to have strayed in from another book—perhaps the one which Thompson ought to write.

Finally, Richard Dienst writes about political economy and television. This is a real concept-crunching tour de force, rather unfashionable in its wrestling with the fundamental Marxist problematic of the economic determination of cultural production.

One question rather fortuitously raised by the time-lag involved both in this publishing enterprise itself and in the admittedly tardy appearance of this review is, Whither film studies? Some of the essays here, to judge from the footnotes, date back to 1987. Once upon a time, the lapse of seven years would have seemed an age. In the 1970s, film theory seemed to be rethinking itself almost every week. But not now. My sense is that little in this collection is in urgent need of review. Not much has happened since, or not much that would demand a revision. Is this the calm before another storm? Is film theory exhausted? Or have its energies dispersed in a dozen different directions?

This lack of apparent impetus towards a new grand theory may be in part the cause of what some might see as the excessive amount of duplication in film publishing right now. This collection is in large part a reprint of an issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*. Jane Gaines' own article in the book has now appeared three times: in *SAQ*, in this collection, and in her own book *Contested Culture*. Similarly with Fredric Jameson, whose essay also appears in his *Signatures of the Visible*, and Miriam Hansen, whose article is included in her *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. There is a suggestion that other essays too in *Classical Hollywood Narrative* either have turned or will turn up between other covers. No one, least of all me, wants to deny film book publishers the chance to turn an honest buck. But is recycling on this scale ecologically sound? It may save intellectual energy, but it surely uses up a lot of trees.

EDWARD BUSCOMBE

■ Edward Buscombe is Head of Publishing at the British Film Institute.

Film in Contemporary China

Critical Debates, 1979–1989

Edited by George S. Semsel, Chen Xihe, and Xia Hong. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993. $47.95.

Since the late 1970s, as the result of economic and social reform, both Chinese film-making and film theory research have gone through drastic changes. While such names as Chen Kaige, Tian Zhuangzhuang, and Zhang Yimou, as well as *Yellow Earth*, *Red Sorghum*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, *Blue Kite*, and *Ju Dou*, are no longer strangers to Western audiences, Western readers are still not familiar with Chinese film scholars' endeavors during the 1980s. This is the period that reveals the energetic vitality of both Chinese film-makers and film scholars after long oppression in a poor political climate, especially since some critics also played active roles in film production. This period represents a new era in post-Mao national cinema culture.

Film in Contemporary China is a timely anthology that collects (translated) essays and dialogues by indigenous film-makers and researchers. It consists of five parts: the call for new social concepts; the issue of culture; *Yingxi* (literally, cinematic image and drama, with emphasis on dramatized plot); the entertainment film; the debate on new Chinese film theory; and a conclusion by the editors. Of the 17 articles, seven are in the form of a dialogue, apparently recorded from some panel discussions.

Be it in the discussion of the nature of *Yingxi* theory, the Fifth Generation, or entertainment films, the issue of "traditional culture" haunts the essays. Traditional culture is, of course, not to be neglected, since it influences the political elite, the audiences, the artists, and their

ing small-town America through the eyes of a radically disturbed contemporary sensibility, reads, though never less than characteristically elegant and incisive, like something that has strayed in from another book; evidently, one of Professor Jameson's own.

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Critical Debates, 1979–1989

Edited by George S. Semsel, Chen Xihe, and Xia Hong. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993. $47.95.

Since the late 1970s, as the result of economic and social reform, both Chinese film-making and film theory research have gone through drastic changes. While such names as Chen Kaige, Tian Zhuangzhuang, and Zhang Yimou, as well as *Yellow Earth*, *Red Sorghum*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, *Blue Kite*, and *Ju Dou*, are no longer strangers to Western audiences, Western readers are still not familiar with Chinese film scholars' endeavors during the 1980s. This is the period that reveals the energetic vitality of both Chinese film-makers and film scholars after long oppression in a poor political climate, especially since some critics also played active roles in film production. This period represents a new era in post-Mao national cinema culture.

Film in Contemporary China is a timely anthology that collects (translated) essays and dialogues by indigenous film-makers and researchers. It consists of five parts: the call for new social concepts; the issue of culture; *Yingxi* (literally, cinematic image and drama, with emphasis on dramatized plot); the entertainment film; the debate on new Chinese film theory; and a conclusion by the editors. Of the 17 articles, seven are in the form of a dialogue, apparently recorded from some panel discussions.

Be it in the discussion of the nature of *Yingxi* theory, the Fifth Generation, or entertainment films, the issue of "traditional culture" haunts the essays. Traditional culture is, of course, not to be neglected, since it influences the political elite, the audiences, the artists, and their

works. However, the concept of "Chinese traditional culture" is often a vague and uncertain term in the anthology. It is problematic to look at either "tradition" or "culture" in a homogeneous or simplistic, taken-for-granted way. Besides, the contributors often make dichotomous fallacies when they examine the traditional Chinese way of thinking and how it differs from other cultures' ways of looking at the world. (67, 92) Even the editors take a similar stance in the introduction and conclusion of the book.

The influence of contemporary Western film theory on Chinese film theory in the 1980s is another important issue which should have been addressed more fully in this anthology. Although the editors admit that structuralist, psychoanalytic, and feminist approaches are increasingly influential, and some names—such as Lacan and Althusser—are mentioned occasionally, it is not clear how these approaches are incorporated, applied, or even questioned in the writings collected here. Also, some writers run the risk of abusing the terms willy-nilly simply because they are in vogue. Whether these Western theories have encouraged Chinese film theory to confront or to eliminate the influence of the dominant ideology, as the editors optimistically state in the beginning of the book, is still dubious. Writing and speaking critically under a precarious political circumstance has never been easy (and this is more apparent since the events of 1989). Tensions between film researchers and the dominant class still remain.

The peculiar role of film critics and film theorists in contemporary China—with their close connection with practical film-making—is an issue when they are endowed with the privileges of "directing" film-making practice with the theory they use and develop. What is the relationship between the film critics/theorists, the audience, the film-makers, and the party leaders? Can the power of the intelligentsia eventually lead to elitism and dogmatism? A study of the nature of these critical discourses could have been used to clarify some issues in the collection.

Although the book devotes attention to the context of film-making and film theory development, the textual analysis of some important films made during the period could have widened its scope by discussing such subjects as audience readings in terms of ethnicity, gender, and age; the multiple functions and nature of the cinematic apparatuses in a society changing rapidly in the economic and cultural spheres; and the influence of foreign, especially Hong Kong, films. On the one hand, the anthology lacks intellectual depth when it comes to theoretical debates; on the other hand, it provides a useful historical overview about the ferment in film criticism and changing developments in film-making practice. It has surely contributed to the study of film history in the 1980s in Mainland China.

YANG MING-YU

■ Yang Ming-yu studies critical theory at the University of Maryland at College Park.

Justified Lives

Morality and Narrative in the Films of Sam Peckinpah

By Michael Bliss. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993. $45.00.

Both during and after his lifetime, Sam Peckinpah's work suffered generally from critical neglect and popular miscomprehension. Stereotyped as a gratuitous "Master of Violence" and more recently as "Bloody Sam," the director now undergoes vilification within the currently fashionable parameters of political correctness. While Peckinpah's personal behavior is one matter, his filmic legacy is another. Michael Bliss's recent book presents the reader with a detailed close analysis of the director's work, challenging the uninformed to return to the films (thus ignoring "Hard Copy" scam productions such as Marshall Fine's *Bloody Sam*) in order to interrogate his legacy. Flawed in several respects, somewhat overshadowed by earlier stimulating studies such as Terence Butler's *Crucified Heroes* (1979) and Paul Seydor's *Peckinpah: The Western Films* (1980), Bliss's work challenges the reader to follow D. H. Lawrence's axiom of not trusting an undeniably dissolute author but closely reading his texts. In doing so, we may "discover a generous, loving, vulnerable director whose innovative editing and uncompromising devotion to the need for a personal code of behavior are unique in American filmmaking." (305)

Bliss makes a highly provocative statement concerning a male-oriented director belonging to the masculine tradition of American literature and culture, a tradition often revealing flaws and contradictions. It is a statement open to challenge as well as redefinition, particularly in the light of the author's neglect of recent cinematic theo-

works. However, the concept of "Chinese traditional culture" is often a vague and uncertain term in the anthology. It is problematic to look at either "tradition" or "culture" in a homogeneous or simplistic, taken-for-granted way. Besides, the contributors often make dichotomous fallacies when they examine the traditional Chinese way of thinking and how it differs from other cultures' ways of looking at the world. (67, 92) Even the editors take a similar stance in the introduction and conclusion of the book.

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ries of masculinity, spectatorship, male masochism, the body, excess, and poststructuralist theories of spectatorship. *Justified Lives* is a problematic book in this respect. Although it is the first study examining Peckinpah's entire work, Bliss's critical methodology is surprisingly old-fashioned. Noticing frequent citations to Northrop Frye, Jim Kitses, Carl Jung, Frederick Jackson Turner, and Henry Nash Smith, the reader looks in vain for more contemporary theorists such as Foucault, Kristeva, Silverman, and Studlar, who would add a more exciting modern nuance to the films under discussion. The text also omits important recent work such as David Cook's reevaluation of *The Wild Bunch* and Christopher Sharrett's argument for Peckinpah's radical vision. There is an urgent need to examine Peckinpah's work in the light of modern critical approaches and *Justified Lives* does not do this.

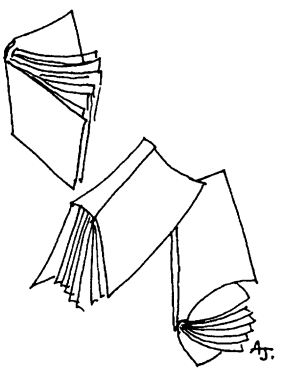
The book is thus a mixed blessing. But despite important theoretical losses, there are considerable gains. Chief among these is a close analysis of various stylistic and thematic motifs employed by Peckinpah which are often ignored in discussions of the director's work. Bliss engages in a detailed, sometimes tedious (but highly necessary) examination of Peckinpah's films, challenging readers to return to the texts to discover a radical vision with moralistic overtones. As Stephen Prince demonstrated in his recent Society for Cinema Studies conference presentation, "Melancholy and Violence in Peckinpah's Films," a disturbing ambivalence exists in the director's work. His characters are often more disturbed by their violent acts than exultant in them. Bliss reveals Peckinpah's debt to the Western tradition even in his modern films, showing the supposedly misogynistic *Straw Dogs* as embodying an "obvious distortion of the idealized Western hero," (11) and ironically revealing the representative of civilized behavior as the most destructive and reprehensible character in the film. As Bliss shows, "No Peckinpah film depicts violence without also critiquing it." (152) The author's deliberately provocative statements and detailed analysis of every film provides stimulating challenges to Peckinpah's detractors.

Bliss's chapters on *The Deadly Companions, Ride the High Country, The Wild Bunch,* and *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* are clearly influenced by his predecessors and contain little new thematic information. Their only contributions lie in a meticulous concern for textual detail, as seen in Bliss's close attention to visual and temporal strategies employed in films from *The Wild Bunch* onwards. Bliss's analysis of freeze-frame, credit captions in the opening of *The Wild Bunch* (92–96) is exceptional. His most accomplished analysis of Peckinpah's sophisticated montage strategies involving time, desire, and memory occurs in the *Junior Bonner* chapter. Frame and spatial strategies clearly influence this film, especially in a title sequence detailing "the antagonism between those events, past and present, that have occurred during the lifetime of its central character." (164) Noting freeze-frame leave-takings in the final part, Bliss comments, "The technique, which harks back to the titles sequence, suggests that these characters are already moving into the confines of memory." (193) As he shows in the chapter on *The Getaway*, the editing technique may give "access to two different time sequences," (200) often displaying to audiences a privileged access into the minds of characters trapped by time, history, and material circumstances. The author sets an important visual legacy for future Peckinpah scholars to follow.

The most disappointing chapter concerns *The Osterman Weekend.* In no other film does the director's trenchant, visually Brechtian analysis of the film and television media appear, contradicting Bliss's description of the film as "a new concern for Peckinpah." (296) The "blatant self-reflexivity" of the *The Osterman Weekend* appears early in the director's work, even as far back as his 1954 USC Master's Thesis (surprisingly absent from the bibliography, it is easily accessible on microfilm). *The Osterman Weekend* is perhaps Peckinpah's most theoretically self-conscious work, lending itself to theories concerning Foucault's ideas of the Panopticon and visual manipulation of the male body. But Bliss entirely misses Peckinpah's satire on religious martyrdom and male masochism. The ending may be more pessimistic than optimistic: the humans are gone and only the empty studio remains.

TONY WILLIAMS

■ Tony Williams teaches at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.



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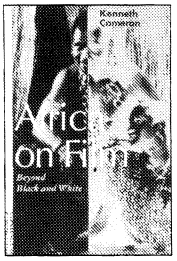

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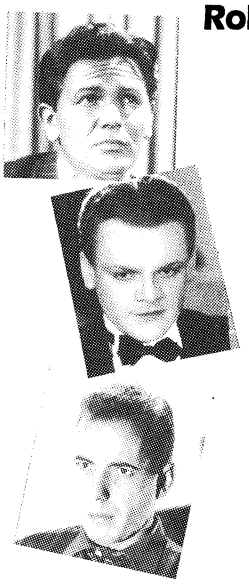

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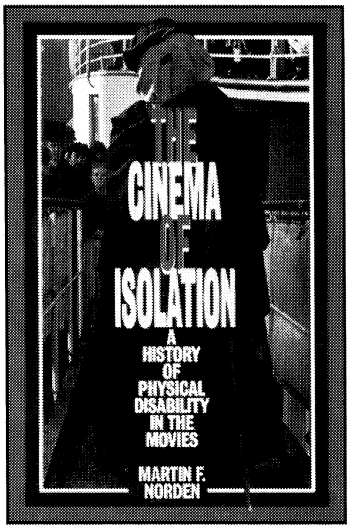

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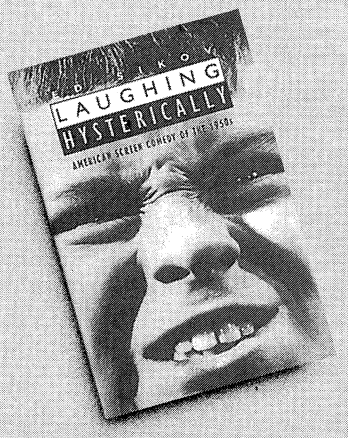

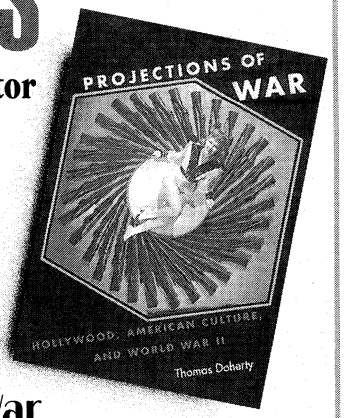

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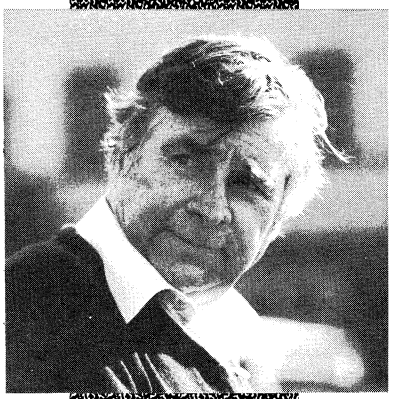

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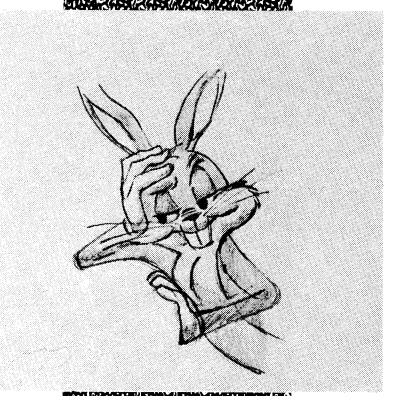

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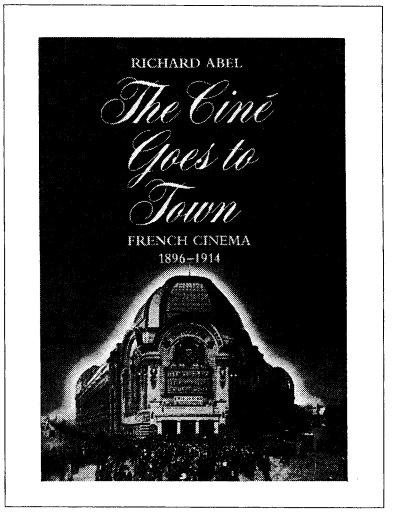

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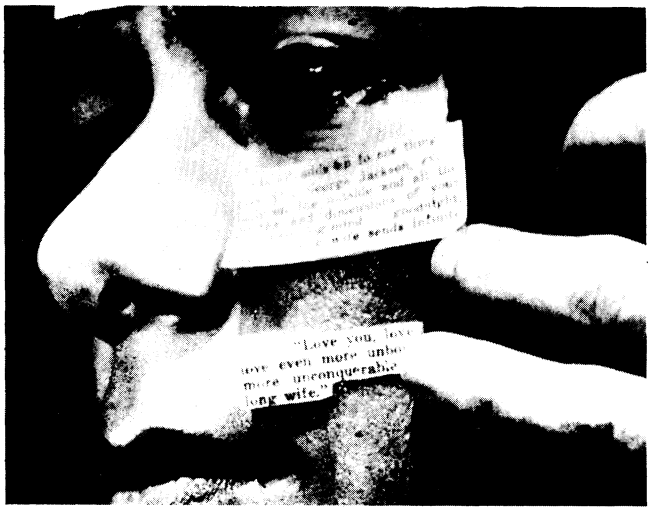

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